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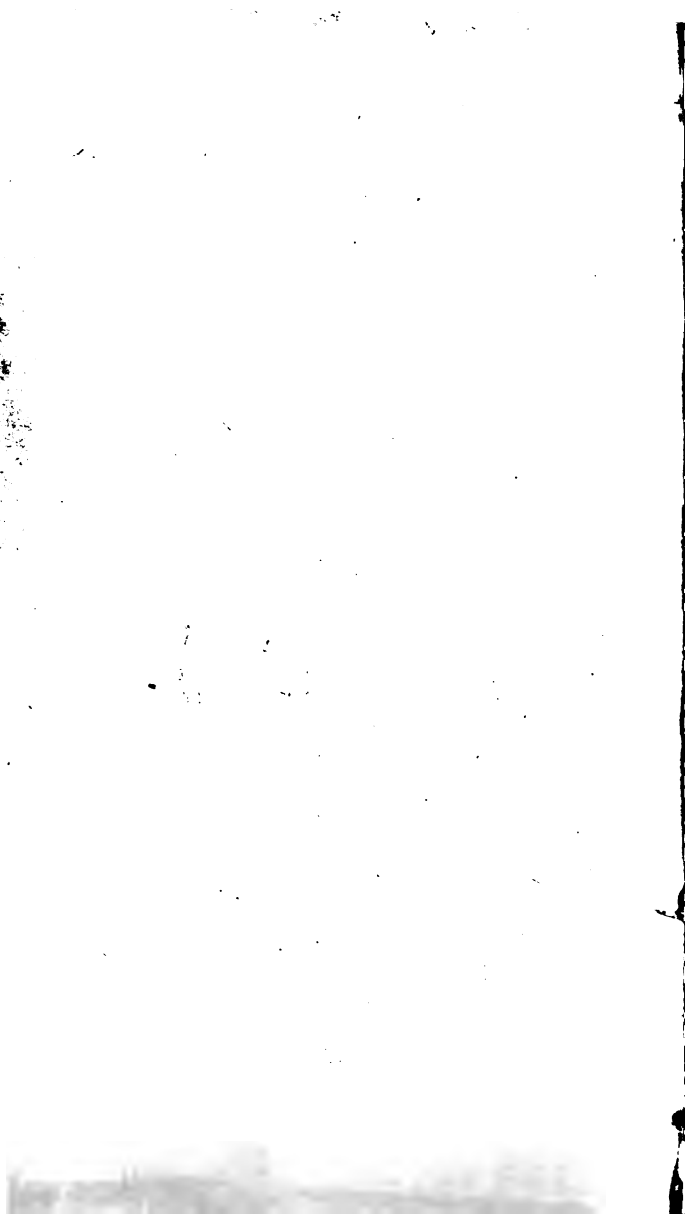
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THE
GREAT IMPORTANCE
OF A
RELIGIOUS LIFE
CONSIDERED.

BY THE LATE WILLIAM MELMOTH, Esq.
OF LINCOLN'S INN, LONDON.

FROM THE TWENTY-THIRD LONDON EDITION.

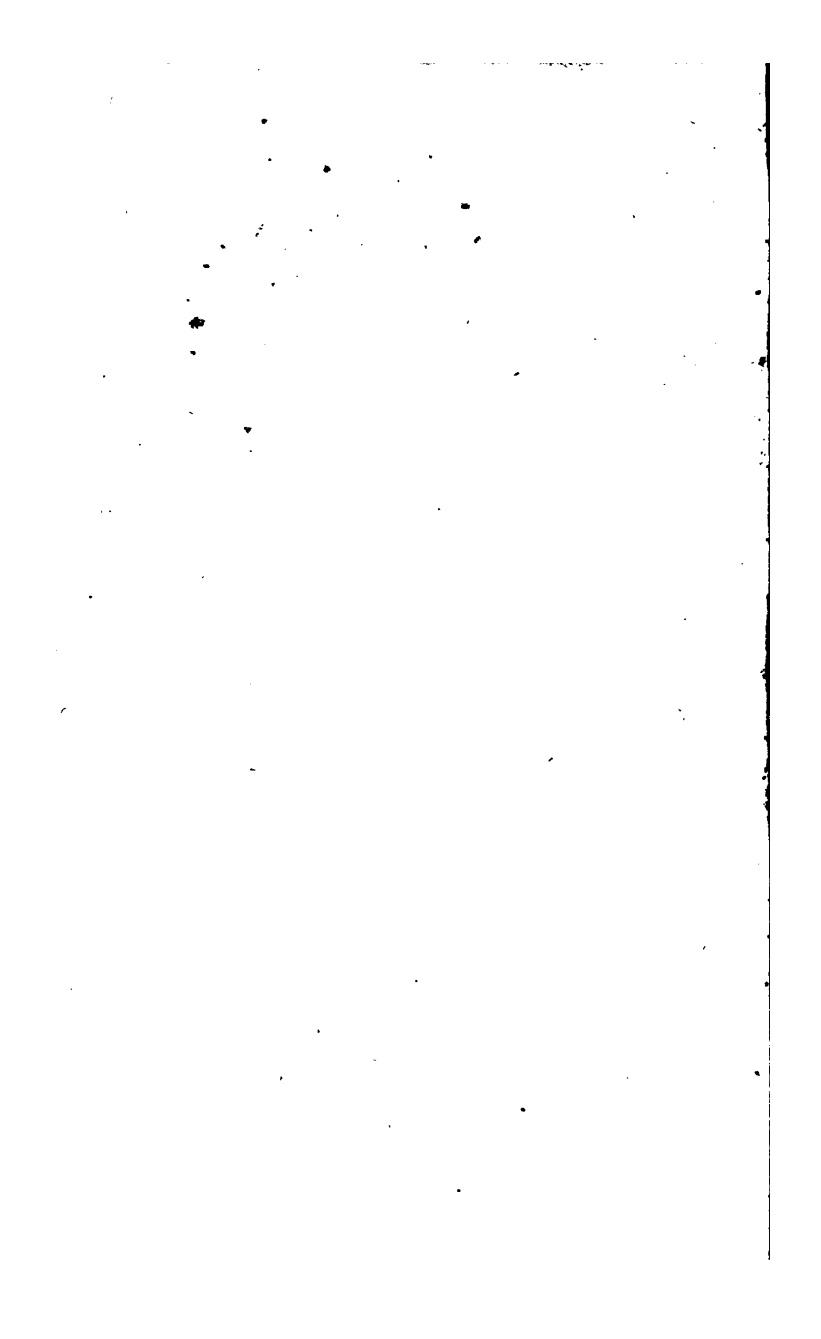
TO WHICH ARE ADDED,
PREFATORY OBSERVATIONS
ON THE CREDIBILITY
OF THE
CHRISTIAN RELIGION;

AND,
A few concise observations on
P R A Y E R.

Alexandria:

PRINTED BY COTTOM AND STEWART, FOR
SAMUEL BISHOP.

1802.



ADVERTISEMENT

TO THE
FIRST AMERICAN EDITION.

LEAVING to others the task of answering objections to a revelation which all, except the wicked, who are determined neither to repent or reform, must at least *hope* to be true, the author of the following work, in a style at once simple and impressive, warm, yet perfectly free from enthusiasm, calls the attention of the thoughtless and indifferent to the serious concerns of a future state; recommends the practice of those plain precepts of christianity which formed the rule of his own life; and with irresistible conviction, points out to his rea-

der the happy effects of a life of piety and virtue, both here and hereafter.

AT a time when the world is deluged with publications—not indeed grossly obscene, immoral and impious, but of a nature even more dangerous in their consequences—whereby the passions of the reader are inflamed by descriptions of characters and scenes the most voluptuous, if not meretricious; in which the incidents are artfully contrived to place *vice* in such a light as by thoughtless youth, to be scarcely distinguishable from *virtue*; and wherein that religion, which would operate as an antidote, is attempted to be blown away, as it were, by a side wind:—with publica-

(a) That the world at present abounds with books of this description, is a fact too notorious to require proof. Witness the many which have disgraced the British Press. Witness “those swarms of publications now daily issuing from the Banks of the Danube,” under the specious denomination of GERMAN LITERATURE;—“that sober and unsuspected mass of mischief, which, by assuming the plausible names of Science, of Philosophy, of Arts, of Belles Lettres, is gradually administering death to the principles of those who would be on their guard, had the poison been labelled with its own pernicious title. Avowed attacks upon revelation are more easily

tions which thus sap the foundations of virtue and morality, and pollute their very source; break down the barriers between virtue and vice, and produce in the rising generation, as a necessary consequence, a degree of profligacy, dissipation and licentiousness, the effects of which cannot be contemplated without horror; —at a period when works of such a tendency find so many patrons among the public, the publisher hopes to be excused for introducing one little tract, which has for its object the promotion of religion and piety.

But independent of every other consideration, the unexampled sale which this work has experienced in England, will alone, it is presumed, render any apology for its republication here, unnecessary. In a period

“ resisted, because the malignity is advertised; but who
 “ suspects the destruction which lurks under the harmless
 “ or instructive names of GENERAL HISTORY, NATU-
 “ RAL HISTORY, TRAVELS, VOYAGES, LIVES, EN-
 “ CYCLOPEDIAS, CRITICISM, and ROMANCE.”——
 (See “ *Strictures on Female Education*,” by Hannah
 More—a work of uncommon merit, and at this time, in-
 particular, of inestimable value.)

of less than twenty-five years, *seventy-five thousand* copies of the book were sold; and the style in which a new edition of it has lately been printed, seems to shew, that, like the religion it inculcates, the more thoroughly it becomes known, the more highly is its value estimated. ^b

Here, it may be thought, the publisher should have closed his advertisement; but as this little work will probably fall into the hands of some of those persons whose minds, by a perusal of authors of the description

“ (h) This is a re-publication of a very popular and
 “ meritorious performance. It has been long and justly ad-
 “ mired by all the best and most enlightened of our coun-
 “ trymen. The author’s character is here drawn with
 “ elegance and brevity by his son, who might well be proud
 “ of such a father. The preface is judicious, and written
 “ by himself. In it he honestly avows, the design of his la-
 “ bour is to check the rage of sensual pleasures, which he
 “ foresaw would result, as it doubtless has done, in gross
 “ immorality and general impiety. In a period of less
 “ than twenty-five years we are informed SEVENTY-FIVE
 “ thousand copies of the book were sold. Such a circula-
 “ tion of so much good sense and sound reasoning were
 “ never more devoutly to be wished for than now. And
 “ we must own it comes abroad with circumstances not
 “ unacceptable to the present taste. It is elegantly printed
 “ on a beautiful wove paper. It is written by an

already alluded to, ^c have become prejudiced against the christian revelation; and as the best arguments drawn from the sacred writings, and founded on their supposed authenticity, can have no weight with those who deny the authority of the scriptures themselves; he hopes to be excused for adding thereto, some *prefatory observations on the credibility of the Christian Religion.*

Being convinced that it is not to any deficiency of evidence, or failure of argument, but to a reluctance to examine, and indifference about, those evidences and arguments which have already been brought forward in support of the Christian Religion,

“ HONEST and eminent Lawyer. It assumes a style of
 “ sober, deliberate discussion, without the rant of enthusiasm, or the cant of hypocrisy. It is so perfectly free of
 “ priestcraft, that the most profane are under no temptation
 “ to consider it merely as a professional lure, or artifice
 “ of the clergy, for spunging on the laity. There are
 “ no prejudices against it but the subject, and we pledge
 “ ourselves that our readers will like the subject the
 “ better, the more seriously and the oftener they peruse
 “ this masterly and elegant account of it.”

Ladies Monthly Museum, Vol. 1. p. 238.

(c) See Note at the bottom of page 4.

that the growth of modern infidelity should be attributed; the author (or compiler) of the following observations has been more studious to collect in a small compass, and to place in a strong point of view, the substance of what has been judiciously said by others, than to advance new arguments on the subject himself: indeed, at this period of the christian æra, when the talents, learning, research, and ingenuity of eighteen centuries have been exhausted in the controversy, it is scarcely to be expected that any very forcible arguments should now be brought forward, which have not, in some shape or other, already been suggested.

In throwing together the following observations, the compiler's principal object has been, to induce those easy profelytes to infidelity who have never perhaps thought seriously on the subject of the Christian Religion, and who know but little or nothing of the evidences by which it is supported; to investigate more thoroughly a matter which, in whatever point of view it may be

considered, is certainly of the last importance ; and to convince them that this religion is not a story, so palpably false and incredible, as to justify its rejection even upon a superficial examination, much less without any examination at all. Such is the object of the following observations, and should they have this effect on any, if but on one, and if in that one, the investigation should produce those consequences which may reasonably be expected from an unprejudiced inquiry, the compiler will feel happy in the reflection, that his endeavours in the cause of truth and virtue, weak and humble as they are, have not been wholly useless.

The passages borrowed are all marked as quotations, and the works referred to from which they are taken, except in some instances where the compiler found it convenient to interweave the sentiments of others with his own, without troubling the reader with a reference.—In these cases he has generally adopted the language of his author,

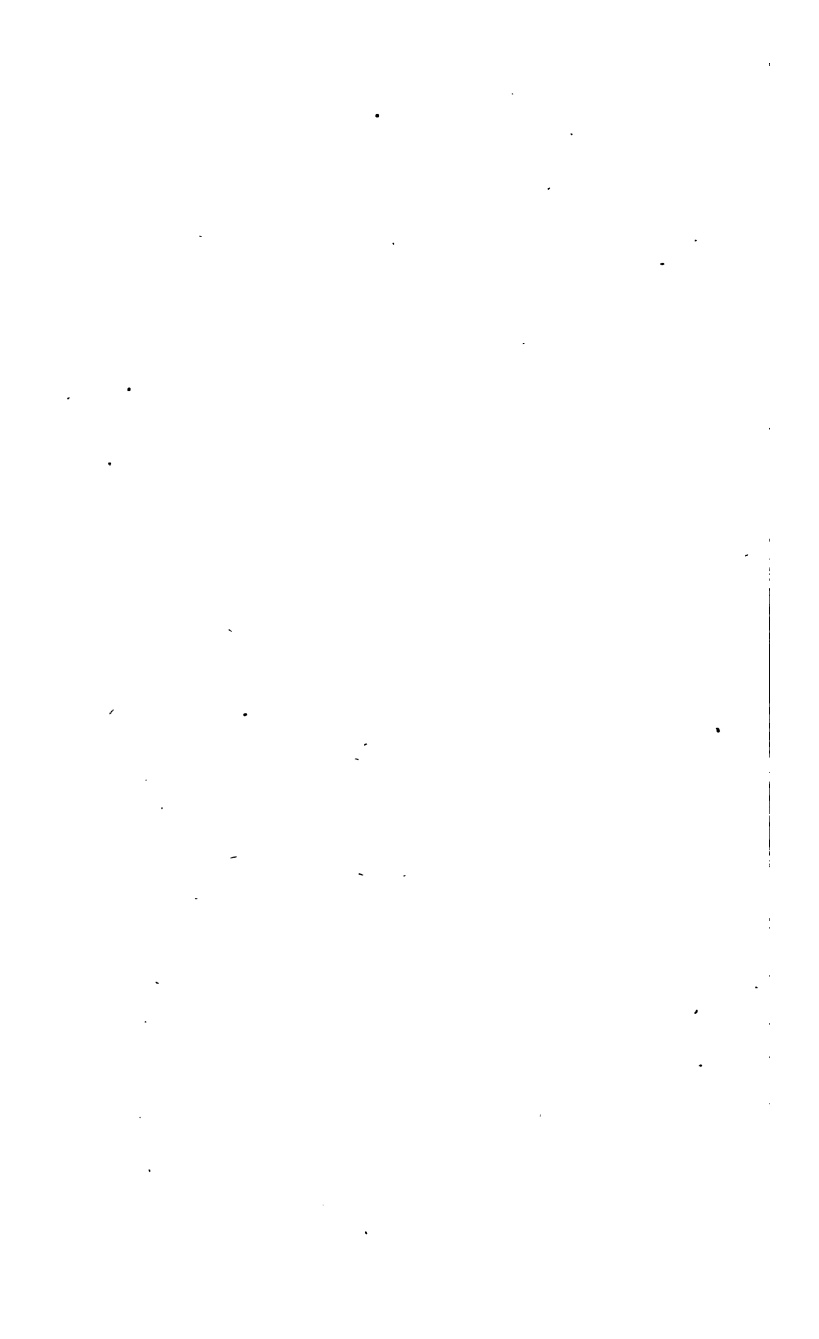
10 A D V E R T I S E M E N T.

not chusing to alter that which he could
not improve, to gratify an affectation of ori-
ginality.

ALEXANDRIA, *January 1*, 1802.

PREFATORY OBSERVATIONS
ON THE
CREDIBILITY
OF THE
CHRISTIAN RELIGION.

ENTERED ACCORDING TO ACT OF CONGRESS.



Prefatory Observations, &c.

IN the present enlightened, though licentious age, but few men, I presume, can be found, who admit not the immortality of the soul; and still fewer perhaps, who, (admitting the soul's immortality,) are disposed to deny, that the state in which it will exist after having ceased to actuate our present mortal bodies, is a consideration the most interesting and momentous that can possibly engage the attention of mankind. On this subject, reason and nature afford us, at the most, but a very obscure light. *Revelation*, singly and alone, offers itself as the only means of clearing up, with any degree of satisfaction, the important mystery. By this, if true, life and immortality are brought

to light, and the means clearly pointed out by which we may obtain everlasting happiness. With the records of such a revelation in their hands, is it not then astonishing that mankind do not earnestly, and solicitously, and with all their faculties, apply themselves to enquire into the authenticity of writings which profess to reveal truths to them so interesting and momentous ! Truths so important, that in comparison therewith, all other concerns vanish, or seem “trifles light as air ?” Or—to express myself in the appropriate and elegant language of a liberal divine,^d whose amiable manners, piety and learning, reflect honor on a dignified station ; “Is it not a very wonderful thing, that a being such as man, placed on a little globe of earth, in a little corner of the universe, cut off from all communication with the other systems which are dispersed through the immensity of space ; imprisoned as it were on the spot where he happens to be born ; almost wholly ignorant of the variety of spiritual exist-

(d) Richard Watson, D. D. F. R. S. and Bishop of Landaff.

ences, and circumscribed in his knowledge of material things by their remoteness, magnitude, or minuteness; a stranger to the nature of the very pebbles on which he treads; unacquainted, or but very obscurely informed by his natural faculties of his condition after death;—is it not wonderful that a being such as this, should reluctantly receive, or fastidiously reject, the instruction of the Eternal God! or, if this is saying too much, that he should hastily, and negligently, and triumphantly conclude, that the Supreme Being never had condescended to instruct the race of man? It might properly have been expected, that a rational being, so circumstanced, would have sedulously inquired into a subject of such vast importance; that he would not have suffered himself to have been diverted from the investigation, by the pursuits of wealth, or honor, or any temporal concern; much less by notions taken up without attention, arguments admitted without examination, or prejudices imbibed in early youth, from the prophane ridicule, or

impious jestings of sensual or immoral men.”^c

Nor is it sufficient, in an affair of such infinite importance, that we take a *superficial* view of the subject. It is an old, but very just observation, that a little learning is, in many cases, more dangerous to its possessor than ignorance itself, and in no instance can this be more true, than in that of Religion. If a man is already prejudiced against the Christian Revelation, a superficial view of the matter will be more likely to confirm, than to banish those prejudices ; or, if he was not before prejudiced, it is not improbable, but he will, by that means, become so. An acute reasoner, speaking on this subject to “those busy or idle persons, whose time and thoughts are wholly engrossed by the pursuits of business or pleasure, ambition or luxury ; who know nothing of this religion, except what they have accidentally picked up by desultory conversation, or superficial reading, and have thence determined with them-

(c) Preface to ‘a Collection of Theological Tracts,’ by Dr. Watson.

selves, that a pretended revelation, founded
 on so strange and improbable a story, so
 contradictory to reason, so adverse to the
 world and all its occupations, so incredible
 in its doctrines, and in its precepts so im-
 practicable, can be nothing more than the
 imposition of priest-craft upon ignorant and
 illiterate ages, and artfully continued as an
 engine well adapted to awe and govern the
 superstitious vulgar ;”—speaking to persons
 of this description, an acute reasoner
 has said, “ I am ready to acknowledge that
 these gentlemen, as far as their information
 reaches, are perfectly in the right; and if
 they are endued with good understandings,
 which have been entirely devoted to the bu-
 siness or amusements of the world, they can
 pass no other judgment, and must revolt
 from the history and doctrines of this reli-
 gion. *The preaching Christ crucified, was to
 the Jews a stumbling-block, and to the Greeks
 foolishness ;*† and so it must appear to all, who,
 like them, judge from established prejudices,
 false learning, and superficial know-

(†) 1. Cor. i. 26.

ledge ;³ but if they would go more deeply into the subject ; if such persons would lay aside their prejudices, and give themselves the trouble carefully to examine the records of the christian religion, and the historical evidence by which it is supported ; if they would consider the sublimity of its doctrines, the beauty and justness of its moral precepts ; enter into the wonders of its dispensations, follow the chain of its prophecies, and mark their exact fulfilment ; if they would further consider who are the authors of this religion, the means by which it was propagated, the rapidity with which it spread, and its speedy establishment, under circumstances the most adverse ; they would then, I conceive, see the matter in another light, and form a very different conclusion ; they would then perceive the impossibility of such a religion having been invented or propagated by such persons ;—of events of such vast magnitude, having been accomplished by means so insignificant ;—of effects so astonishing,

(g) See “A view of the internal evidence of the Christian Religion,” by Soame Jenys.

having been produced by causes so obviously inadequate, *without the intervention of a supernatural power.*

This subject has been treated in so masterly a manner by a modern writer on the *internal* evidence of the Christian Religion,^b and the arguments drawn therefrom in support of its divine origin, stated with so much neatness, and pointed with such peculiar effect, that I shall take the liberty of laying them before the reader without further apology.

He says, “ To ascertain the true system, and genuine doctrines of this religion, after the undecided controversies of above seventeen centuries, and to remove all the rubbish which artifice and ignorance may have heaped upon it in all that time, would indeed be an arduous task, which I shall by no means undertake ; but to shew that it cannot possibly be derived from human wisdom, or human imposture, is a work, I think, of no great difficulty, and requi-

(b) Soame Jenyns.—See his “ View of the internal evidence of the Christian Religion,” for the subsequent extract.

ring no extraordinary abilities, and therefore I shall attempt that, and that alone, by stating, and then explaining, the following plain and undeniable propositions."

"First, That there is now extant a book intituled the New Testament.

"Secondly, that from this book may be extracted a system of religion intirely new, both with regard to the object and the doctrines, not only infinitely superior to, but unlike every thing which had ever before entered into the mind of man.

"Thirdly, that from this book may likewise be collected a system of ethics, in which every moral precept founded on reason is carried to a higher degree of purity and perfection, than in any other of the wisest philosophers of preceding ages; every moral precept founded on false principles is totally omitted, and many new precepts added peculiarly corresponding with the new object of this religion.

"Lastly, That such a system of religion and morality could not possibly have been the work of any man, or set of men; much

less of those obscure, ignorant, and illiterate persons, who actually did discover, and publish it to the world: and that therefore it must undoubtedly have been effected by the interposition of divine power, that is, that it must derive its origin from God.”

PROPOSITION I.

“**V**ERY little need be said to establish my first proposition, which is singly this: That there is now extant a book intitled the New Testament; that is, there is a collection of writings distinguished by that denomination, containing four historical accounts of the birth, life, actions, discourses, and death of an extraordinary person named Jesus Christ, who was born in the reign of Augustus Cæsar, preached a new religion throughout the country of Judea, and was put to a cruel and ignominious death in the reign of Tiberius. Also one other historical account of

the travels, transactions, and orations of some mean and illiterate men, known by the title of his Apostles, whom he commissioned to propagate his religion after his death ; which he foretold them he must suffer in confirmation of its truth. To these are added several epistolary writings, addressed by these persons to their fellow-labourers in this work, or to the several churches or societies of Christians, which they had established in the several cities through which they had passed.

“ It would not be difficult to prove, that these books were written soon after those extraordinary events, which are the subjects of them ; as we find them quoted, and referred to by an uninterrupted succession of writers from those to the present times : nor would it be less easy to shew, that the truth of all those events, miracles only excepted, can no more be reasonably questioned, than the truth of any other facts recorded in any history whatever ; as there can be no more reason to doubt, that there existed such a person as Jesus Christ, speaking, acting, and suffering in such a manner as is there de-

scribed, than that there were such men as Tiberius, Herod, or Pontius Pilate, his contemporaries ; or to suspect, that Peter, Paul and James, were not the authors of those epistles, to which their names are affixed, than that Cicero and Pliny did not write those which are ascribed to them. It might also be made appear, that these books having been wrote by various persons, at different times, and in distant places, could not possibly have been the work of a single impostor, nor of a fraudulent combination, being all stamped with the same marks of an uniform originality in their very frame and composition.

“ But all these circumstances I shall pass over unobserved, as they do not fall in with the course of my argument, nor are necessary for the support of it. Whether these books were wrote by the authors whose names are prefixed to them, whether they have been enlarged, diminished, or any way corrupted, by the artifice or ignorance of translators or transcribers ; whether in the historical parts the writers were instructed by a perpetual, a partial, or by any inspira-

tion at all; whether in the religious and moral parts, they received their doctrines from a divine influence, or from the instructions and conversation of their master; whether in their facts or sentiments there is always the most exact agreement, or whether in both they sometimes differ from each other; whether they are in any case mistaken, or always infallible; or even pretended to be so, I shall not here dispute: let the Deist avail himself of all these doubts and difficulties, and decide them in conformity to his own opinions, I shall not contend, because they affect not my argument: all that I assert is a plain fact, which cannot be denied, that such writings do now exist."

P R O P O S I T I O N I I .

"MY second proposition is not quite so simple, but I think, not less undeniable than the former, and is this: That from this

book may be extracted a system of religion entirely new, both with regard to the object, and the doctrines; not only infinitely superior to, but totally unlike every thing which had ever before entered into the mind of man: I say extracted, because all the doctrines of this religion having been delivered at various times, and on various occasions, and here only historically recorded, no uniform or regular system of theology is here to be found; and better perhaps it had been, if less labour had been employed by the learned, to bend and twist these divine materials into the polished forms of human systems, to which they never will submit, and for which they were never intended by their great author. Why he chose not to leave any such behind him we know not, but it might possibly be, because he knew, that the imperfection of man was incapable of receiving such a system, and that we are more properly, and more safely conducted by the distant and scattered rays, than by the too powerful sunshine of divine illumination: ‘If I have told you earthly things,” says he, ‘and ye believe not, how shall ye believe

“if I tell you of heavenly things?”; that is, if my instructions concerning your behaviour in the present, as relative to a future life, are so difficult to be understood, that you can scarcely believe me, how shall you believe, if I endeavour to explain to you the nature of celestial beings, the designs of providence, and the mysteries of his dispensations; subjects which you have neither ideas to comprehend, nor language to express?

“First then, the object of this religion is entirely new, and is this; to prepare us by a state of probation for the kingdom of heaven. This is every where professed by Christ and his apostles to be the chief end of the Christian’s life; the crown for which he is to contend, the goal to which he is to run, the harvest which is to pay him for all his labours: Yet, previous to their preaching, no such prize was ever hung out to mankind, nor any means prescribed for the attainment of it.

“It is indeed true, that some of the philo-

sophers of antiquity entertained notions of a future state, but mixed with much doubt and uncertainty : their legislators also endeavoured to infuse into the minds of the people a belief of rewards and punishments after death ; but by this they only intended to give a sanction to their laws, and to enforce the practice of virtue for the benefit of mankind in the present life ; this alone seems to have been their end, and a meritorious end it was : but christianity not only operates more effectually to this end, but has a nobler design in view, which is, by a proper education here, to render us fit members of a celestial society hereafter. ~~In all former re-~~ ligions the good of the present life was the first object ; in the christian it is but the second ; in those, men were incited to promote that good by the hopes of a future reward ; in this, the practice of virtue is enjoined in order to qualify them for that reward. There is great difference, I apprehend, in these two plans, that is, in adhering to virtue from its present utility, in expectation of future happiness, and living in such a manner as to qualify us for the acceptance

and enjoyment of that happiness ; and the conduct and dispositions of those, who act on these different principles, must be no less different : on the first, the constant practice of justice, temperance, and sobriety, will be sufficient ; but on the latter, we must add to these an habitual piety, faith, resignation, and contempt of the world : the first may make us very good citizens, but will never produce a tolerable christian. Hence it is that christianity insists more strongly, than any preceding institution, religious or moral, on purity of heart and a benevolent disposition ; because these are absolutely necessary to its great end ; but in those whose recommendations of virtue, regard the present life only, and whose promised rewards in another were low and sensual, no preparatory qualifications were requisite to enable men to practise the one, or to enjoy the other ; and therefore we see this object is peculiar to this religion ; and, with it, was entirely new.

“ But although this object, and the principle on which it is founded, were new, and perhaps undiscoverable by reason, yet when

discovered they are so consonant to it, that we cannot but readily assent to them. For the truth of this principle, that the present life is a state of probation, and education to prepare us for another, is confirmed by every thing which we see around us : it is the only key which can open to us the designs of Providence in the œconomy of human affairs, the only clue which can guide us through that pathless wilderness, and the only plan on which this world could possibly have been formed, or on which the history of it can be comprehended or explained. It could never have been formed on a plan of happiness, because it is every where overspread with innumerable miseries ; nor of misery, because it is interspersed with many enjoyments : it could not have been constituted for a scene of wisdom and virtue, because the history of mankind is little more than a detail of their follies and wickedness ; nor of vice, because that is no plan at all, being destructive of all existence, and consequently of its own. But on this system all that we here meet with may be easily accounted for ; for this mixture of happiness

and misery, of virtue and vice, necessarily results from a state of probation and education; as probation implies trials, sufferings, and a capacity of offending; and education a propriety of chastisement, for those offences.

“ In the next place, the doctrines of this religion are equally new with the object; and contain ideas of God and of man, of the present and of a future life, and of the relations which all these bear to each other, totally unheard of, and quite dissimilar from, any which had ever been thought on, previous to its publication. No other ever drew so just a portrait of the worthlessness of this world and all its pursuits; nor exhibited such distinct, lively, and exquisite pictures of the joys of another; of the resurrection of the dead, the last judgment, and the triumphs of the righteous in that tremendous day, ‘ when this corruptible shall put on incorruption, and this mortal shall put on immortality.’^k No other has ever represented the Supreme Being, in the charac-

(k) : Cor. xv. 53.

ter of three persons united in one God.^l No other has attempted to reconcile those seeming contradictory, but both true propositions, the contingency of future events, and the foreknowledge of God ; or the free will of the creature with the over-ruling grace of the Creator : no other has so fully declared the necessity of wickedness and punishment, yet so effectually instructed individuals, to resist the one, and to escape the other : no other has ever pretended to give any account of the depravity of man, or to point out any remedy for it : no other has ventured to declare the unpardonable nature of sin without the influence of a mediatorial interposition, and a vicarious atonement from the sufferings of a superior being. ^m

(l) That there subsists some such union in the divine nature, the whole tenour of the New Testament seems to express, and it was so understood in the earliest ages : but whether this union does, or does not imply equality ; or whether it subsists in general, or only in particular circumstances, we are not informed, and therefore on these questions it is not only unnecessary, but improper for us to decide.

(m) That Christ suffered and died as an atonement for the sins of mankind, is a doctrine so constantly and so strongly enforced through every part of the New Testa-

Whether these wonderful doctrines are worthy of our belief, must depend on the opinion which we entertain of the authority of those who published them to the world ; but certain it is, that they are all so far removed from every tract of the human imagination, that it seems equally impossible, that they should ever have been derived from the knowledge, or the artifice of man.

“ Some indeed there are, who, by perverting the established signification of words, (which they call explaining) have ventured to expunge all those doctrines out of the scriptures, for no other reason than that they are not able to comprehend them ; and argue thus :—The scriptures are the word of God ; in his word, no propositions contradictory to reason can have a place ; these propositions are contradictory to reason, and therefore they are not there. But if these bold assertors would claim any regard, they

ment, that whoever will seriously peruse those writings, and deny that it is there, may, with as much reason and truth, after reading the works of Thucydides and Livy, assert, that in them no mention is made of any facts relative to the histories of Greece and Rome.

should revise their argument, and say :—
 These doctrines make a part, and a material
 part of the scriptures ; they are contradictory
 to reason ; no propositions contradictory to
 reason can be a part of the word of God, and
 therefore neither the scriptures, nor the pre-
 tended revelation contained in them, can
 be derived from him: This would be an ar-
 gument worthy of rational and candid De-
 lists, and demand a respectful attention ; but
 when men pretend to disprove facts by rea-
 soning, they have no right to expect an an-
 swer.

“ And here I cannot omit observing, that
 the personal character of the author of this
 religion is no less new, and extraordinary,
 than the religion itself, who “ spake as never
 .‘ man spake,ⁿ” and lived as never man
 lived ; in proof of this, I do not mean to al-
 ledge, that he was born of a virgin, that he
 fasted forty days, that he performed a varie-
 ty of miracles, and after being buried three
 days, that he arose from the dead ; because
 these accounts will have but little effect on

(n) John vii. 46.

the minds of unbelievers, who, if they believe not the religion, will give no credit to the relation of these facts ; but I will prove it from facts which cannot be disputed ; for instance, he is the only founder of a religion in the history of mankind, which is totally unconnected with all human policy and government, and therefore totally uncondusive to any wordly purpose whatever ; all others, Mahomet, Numa, and even Moses himself, blended their religious institutions with their civil, and by them obtained dominion over their respective people ; but Christ neither aimed at, nor would accept of, any such power ; he rejected every object, which all other men pursue, and made choice of all those which others fly from, and are afraid of ; he refused power, riches, honours, and pleasure, and courted poverty, ignominy, tortures and death. Many have been the enthusiasts and impostors, who have endeavoured to impose on the world pretended revelations, and some of them from pride, obstinacy, or principle, have gone so far, as to lay down their lives, rather than retract ; but I defy history to shew one, who ever

made his own sufferings and death a necessary part of his original plan, and essential to his mission; this Christ actually did; he foresaw, foretold, declared their necessity, and voluntarily endured them. If we seriously contemplate the divine lessons, the perfect precepts, the beautiful discourses, and the consistent conduct of this wonderful person, we cannot possibly imagine, that he could have been either an idiot or a madman; and yet, if he was not what he pretended to be, he can be considered in no other light; and even under this character he would deserve some attention, because of so sublime and rational an insanity, there is no other instance in the history of mankind.

“ If any one can doubt of the superior excellence of this religion above all which preceded it, let him but peruse with attention those unparalleled writings in which it is transmitted to the present times, and compare them with the most celebrated productions of the Pagan world; and if he is not sensible of their superior beauty, simplicity, and originality, I will venture to pronounce, that he is as deficient in taste, as in faith, and

that he is as bad a critic as a christian: for in what school of ancient philosophy can [he find a lesson of morality so perfect as Christ's sermon on the mount? From which of them can he collect an address to the Deity so concise, and yet so comprehensive; so expressive of all that we want, and all that we could deprecate, as that short prayer, which he formed for, and recommended to, his disciples? From the works of what sage of antiquity can he produce so pathetic a recommendation of benevolence to the distressed, and enforced by such assurances of a reward, as in those words of Christ? "Come, ye
 ' blessed of my Father! inherit the kingdom
 ' prepared for you from the foundation of
 ' the world: for I was an hungred, and ye
 ' gave me meat; I was thirsty, and ye gave
 ' me drink; I was a stranger, and ye took
 ' me in; I was naked, and ye clothed me;
 ' I was sick, and ye visited me; I was in
 ' prison, and ye came unto me. Then shall
 ' the righteous answer him, saying—Lord,
 ' when saw we thee an hungred, and fed
 ' thee, or thirsty, and gave thee drink? when
 ' saw we thee a stranger, and took thee in,

‘ or naked, and clothed thee ? or when saw
 ‘ we thee sick and in prison, and came unto
 ‘ thee ? Then shall I answer and say unto
 ‘ them—Verily, I say unto you, inasmuch
 ‘ as you have done it to the least of these
 ‘ my brethren, ye have done it unto me.”^o

Where is there so just, and so elegant a re-
 proof of eagerness and anxiety in worldly
 pursuits, closed with so forcible an exhorta-
 tion to confidence in the goodness of our Cre-
 ator, as in these words ?—“ Behold the fowls
 ‘ of the air ; for they sow not, neither do
 ‘ they reap, nor gather into barns ; yet your
 ‘ heavenly Father feedeth them. Are ye not
 ‘ much better than they ? Consider the lillies
 ‘ of the field, how they grow ; they toil not,
 ‘ neither do they spin ; and yet I say unto
 ‘ you, that even Solomon in all his glory
 ‘ was not arrayed like one of these : where-
 ‘ fore, if God so clothe the grass of the field,
 ‘ which to-day is, and to-morrow is cast into
 ‘ the oven, shall he not much more clothe
 ‘ you ? O ye of little faith !”^p By which of
 their most celebrated poets are the joys re-

(o) Matt. xxv. 34.

(p) Matt. vi. 26. 28.

served for the righteous in a future state, so sublimely described, as by this short declaration, that they are superior to all description? “ Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, ‘ neither have entered into the heart of man, ‘ the things which God hath prepared for ‘ them that love him.”^q Where amidst the dark clouds of Pagan philosophy can he shew us such a clear prospect of a future state, the immortality of the soul, the resurrection of the dead, and the general judgment, as in St. Paul’s first epistle to the Corinthians? Or from whence can he produce such cogent exhortations to the practice of every virtue, such ardent incitements to piety and devotion, and such assistances to attain them, as those which are to be met with throughout every page of these inimitable writings? To quote all the passages in them relative to these subjects, would be almost to transcribe the whole; it is sufficient to observe, that they are every where stamped with such apparent marks of supernatural assistance, as render them indisputably superior to, and

(q) 1 Cor. ii. 9.

totally unlike all human compositions whatever; and this superiority and dissimilarity is still more strongly marked by one remarkable circumstance peculiar to themselves, which is, that whilst the moral parts, being of the most general use, are intelligible to the meanest capacities, the learned and inquisitive throughout all ages, perpetually find in them inexhaustible discoveries, concerning the nature, attributes, and dispensations of providence.

“ To say the truth, before the appearance of christianity there existed nothing like religion on the face of the earth; the Jewish only excepted: all other nations were immersed in the grossest idolatry, which had little or no connection with morality, except to corrupt it by the infamous example of their imaginary deities: they all worshipped a multiplicity of gods and dæmons, whose favour they courted by impious, obscene and ridiculous ceremonies, and whose anger they endeavoured to appease by the most abominable cruelties. In the politest ages of the politest nations in the world, at a time when Greece and Rome had carried the arts of oratory,

poetry, history, architecture, and sculpture to the highest perfection, and made no inconsiderable advances in those of mathematics, natural, and even moral philosophy, in religious knowledge they had made none at all; a strong presumption, that the noblest efforts of the mind of man, unassisted by revelation, were unequal to the task. Some few indeed of their philosophers were wise enough to reject these general absurdities, and dared to attempt a loftier flight: Plato introduced many sublime ideas of nature, and its first cause, and of the immortality of the soul, which being above his own, and all human discovery, he probably acquired from the books of Moses or the conversation of some Jewish rabbies, which he might have met with in Egypt, where he resided, and studied for several years: from him Aristotle, and from both, Cicero, and some few others, drew most amazing stores of philosophical science, and carried their researches into divine truths as far as human genius alone could penetrate. But these were bright constellations, which appeared singly in several centuries, and even these with all this know-

ledge, were very deficient in true theology. From the visible works of the creation they traced the being and principal attributes of the creator; but the relation which his being and attributes bear to man, they little understood; of piety and devotion they had scarce any sense, nor could they form any mode of worship worthy of the purity and perfection of the divine nature: they occasionally flung out many elegant encomiums on the native beauty, and excellence of virtue: but they founded it not on the commands of God, nor connected it with a holy life, nor hung out the happiness of heaven as its reward, or its object. They sometimes talked of virtue carrying men to heaven, and placing them amongst the gods; but by this virtue they meant only the invention of arts, or feats of arms: for with them heaven was only open to legislators and conquerors, the civilizers, or destroyers of mankind. This was then the summit of religion in the most polished nations in the world, and even this was confined to a few philosophers, prodigies of genius and literature, who were little at-

tended to, and less understood by the generality of mankind in their own countries ; whilst all the rest were involved in one common cloud of ignorance and superstition.

“ At this time christianity broke forth from the east like a rising sun, and dispelled this universal darkness, which obscured every part of the globe, and even at this day prevails in all those remoter regions, to which its salutary influence has not as yet extended. From all those which it has reached, it has, notwithstanding its corruptions, banished all those enormities, and introduced a more rational devotion, and purer morals : it has taught men the unity, and attributes of the Supreme Being, the remission of sins, the resurrection of the dead, life everlasting, and the kingdom of heaven ; doctrines as inconceivable to the wisest of mankind, antecedent to its appearance, as the Newtonian system is at this day, to the most ignorant tribes of savages in the wilds of America ; doctrines, which human reason never could have discovered, but which, when discovered, coincide with, and are confirmed by it ; and which, though beyond the reach of all the learning

and penetration of Plato, Aristotle, and Cicero, are now clearly laid open to the eye of every peasant and mechanic with the bible in his hand. These are all plain facts too glaring to be contradicted, and therefore, whatever we may think of the authority of these books, the relations which they contain, or the inspiration of their authors, of these facts no man, who has eyes to read, or ears to hear, can entertain a doubt; because there are the books, and in them is this religion."

P R O P O S I T I O N III.

"**M**Y third proposition is this, That from this book, called the New Testament, may be collected a system of ethics, in which every moral precept, founded on reason, is carried to a higher degree of purity and perfection, than in any other of the ancient philosophers of preceding ages; every moral

precept founded on false principles is entirely omitted, and many new precepts added, peculiarly corresponding with the new object of this religion.

By moral precepts founded on reason, I mean all those which enforce the practice of such duties as reason informs us must improve our natures, and conduce to the happiness of mankind : such are piety to God, benevolence to men, justice, charity, temperance, and sobriety, with all those which prohibit the commission of the contrary vices, all which debase our natures, and by mutual injuries introduce universal disorder, and consequently universal misery. By precepts founded on false principles, I mean those which recommend fictitious virtues productive of none of these salutary effects, and therefore, however celebrated and admired, are in fact no virtues at all ; such are valour, patriotism, and friendship.

“ That virtues of the first kind are carried to a higher degree of purity and perfection by the christian religion than by any other, it is here unnecessary to prove, because this is a truth which has been frequently demon-

strated by her friends, and never once denied by the most determined of her adversaries; but it will be proper to shew, that those of the latter sort are most judiciously omitted; because they have really no intrinsic merit in them, and are totally incompatible with the genius and spirit of this institution.

“ Valour, for instance, or active courage, is for the most part constitutional and therefore can have no more claim to moral merit, than wit, beauty, health, strength, or any other endowment of the mind or body, and so far is it from producing any salutary effects by introducing peace, order, or happiness into society, that it is the usual perpetrator of all the violences, which from retaliated injuries distract the world with bloodshed and devastation. It is the engine by which the strong are enabled to plunder the weak, the proud to trample upon the humble, and the guilty to oppress the innocent; it is the chief instrument which ambition employs in her unjust pursuits of wealth and power, and is therefore so much extolled by her votaries: it was indeed congenial with

the religion of Pagans, whose gods were for the most part made out of deceased heroes, exalted to heaven as a reward for the mischiefs which they had perpetrated upon earth and therefore with them this was the first of virtues, and had even engrossed that denomination to himself; but whatever merit it may have assumed among Pagans, with christians it can pretend to none, and few or none are the occasions in which they are permitted to exert it; they are so far from being allowed to inflict evil, that they are forbid even to resist it: they are so far from being encouraged to revenge injuries, that one of their first duties is to forgive them; so far from being incited to destroy their enemies, that they are commanded to love them, and to serve them to the utmost of their power. If christian nations, therefore, were nations of christians, all war would be impossible and unknown amongst them, and valour could be neither of use nor estimation, and therefore could never have a place in the catalogue of christian virtues, being irreconcilable with all its precepts. I object not to the praise and honours bestowed on

the valiant, they are the least tribute which can be paid them by those who enjoy safety and affluence by the intervention of their dangers and sufferings : I assert only that active courage can never be a christian virtue, because a christian can have nothing to do with it. Passive courage is indeed frequently, and properly inculcated by this meek and suffering religion, under the titles of patience and resignation : a real and substantial virtue this, and a direct contrast to the former ; for passive courage arises from the noblest dispositions of the human mind, from a contempt of misfortunes, pain, and death, and a confidence in the protection of the Almighty ; active, from the meanest ; from passion, vanity, and self-dependence : passive courage is derived from a zeal for truth, and a perseverance in duty ; active, is the offspring of pride and revenge, and the parent of cruelty and injustice : in short, passive courage is the resolution of a philosopher ; active, the ferocity of a savage. Nor is this more incompatible with the precepts, than with the object of this religion, which is the attainment of the kingdom of heaven ;

for valour is not that sort of violence, by which that kingdom is to be taken ; nor are the turbulent spirits of heroes and conquerors admissible into those regions of peace, subordination, and tranquillity.

“ Patriotism also, that celebrated virtue so much practised in antient, and so much professed in modern times, that virtue, which so long preserved the liberties of Greece, and exalted Rome to the empire of the world : this celebrated virtue, I say, must also be excluded ; because it not only falls short of, but directly counteracts, the extensive benevolence of this religion. A christian is of no country, he is a citizen of the world ; and its neighbours and countrymen are the inhabitants of the remotest regions, whenever their distresses demand his friendly assistance : Christianity commands us to love all mankind, patriotism to oppress all other countries to advance the imaginary prosperity of our own : christianity enjoins us to imitate the universal benevolence of our Creator, who pours forth his blessing on every nation upon earth ; patriotism, to copy the mean partialty of an English parish of-

ficer, who thinks injustice and cruelty meritorious, whenever they promote the interests of his own inconsiderable village. This has ever been a favourite virtue with mankind, because it conceals self-interest under the mask of public spirit, not only from others, but even from themselves, and gives a licence to inflict wrongs and injuries not only with impunity, but with applause ; but it is so diametrically opposite to the great characteristic of this institution, that it never could have been admitted into the list of Christian virtues.

“ Friendship likewise, although more congenial to the principles of christianity, arising from more tender and amiable dispositions, could never gain admittance amongst her benevolent precepts, for the same reason ; because it is too narrow and confined, and appropriates that benevolence to a single object, which is here commanded to be extended over all. Where friendships arise from similarity of sentiments, and disinterested affections, they are advantageous, agreeable, and innocent, but have little pre-

tensions to merit ; for it is justly observed, ‘ If ye love them, which love you, what thanks have ye ? for sinners also love those that love them.’^r But if they are formed from alliances in parties, factions, and interests, or from a participation of vices, the usual parents of what are called friendships among mankind, they are then both mischievous and criminal, and consequently forbidden ; but in their utmost purity deserve no recommendation from this religion.

“ To the judicious omission of these false virtues we may add that remarkable silence, which the christian legislator every where preserves on subjects esteemed by all others of the highest importance, civil government, national policy, and the rights of war and peace ; of these he has not taken the least notice, probably for this plain reason, because it would have been impossible to have formed any explicit regulations concerning them, which must not have been inconsistent with the purity of his religion, or with the practical observance of such imperfect crea-

tures as men ruling over, and contending with each other : for instance, had he absolutely forbid all resistance to the reigning powers, he had constituted a plan of despotism, and made men slaves ; had he allowed it, he must have authorised disobedience, and made them rebels ; had he in direct terms prohibited all war, he must have left his followers for ever an easy prey to every infidel invader ; had he permitted it, he must have licensed all that rapine and murder, with which it is unavoidably attended.

“ Let us now examine what are those new precepts in this religion peculiarly corresponding with the new object of it, that is, preparing us for the kingdom of heaven : of these the chief are poorness of spirit, forgiveness of injuries, and charity to all men ; to these we may add repentance, faith, self-abasement, and a detachment from the world, all moral duties peculiar to this religion, and absolutely necessary to the attainment of its end.

“ Blessed are the poor in spirit ; for theirs
‘ is the kingdom of heaven : ’ by which

poorness of spirit is to be understood a disposition of mind, meek, humble, submissive to power, void of ambition, patient of injuries, and free from all resentment. This was so new, and so opposite to the ideas of all Pagan moralists, that they thought this temper of mind a criminal and contemptible meanness, which must induce men to sacrifice the glory of their country, and their own honour, to a shameful pusillanimity ; and such it appears to almost all who are called Christians even at this day, who not only reject it in practice, but disavow it in principle, notwithstanding this explicit declaration of their master. We see them revenging the smallest affronts by premeditated murder, as individuals, on principles of honour ; and, in their national capacities, destroying each other with fire and sword, for the low considerations of commercial interests, the balance of rival powers, or the ambition of princes : we see them with their last breath animating each other to a savage revenge, and, in the agonies of death, plunging with feeble arms their daggers into the hearts of their opponents : and, what is still worse,

we hear all these barbarisms celebrated by historians, flattered by poets, applauded in theatres, approved in senates, and even sanctified in pulpits. But universal practice cannot alter the nature of truth: pride was not made for man; but humility, meekness, and resignation, that is, poorness of spirit, was made for man; and properly belongs to his dependent and precarious situation; and is the only disposition of mind which can enable him to enjoy ease and quiet here, and happiness hereafter: yet was this important precept entirely unknown until it was promulgated by him, who said, ‘Suffer little children to come unto me, and forbid them not; for of such is the kingdom of heaven: verily I say unto you, whoever shall not receive the kingdom of God as a little child, he shall not enter therein.’

“Another precept, equally new and no less excellent, is forgiveness of injuries: ‘Ye have heard,’ says Christ to his disciples, ‘Thou shalt love thy neighbour, and hate thine enemy; but I say unto you love

(1) Matt. x 14.

‘ your enemies, bless them that curse you,
 ‘ do good to them that hate you, and pray
 ‘ for them which despitefully use you, and
 ‘ persecute you.’^u This was a lesson so new,
 and so utterly unknown, till taught by his
 doctrines, and enforced by his example, that
 the wisest moralists of the wisest nations and
 ages represented the desire of revenge as a
 mark of a noble mind, and the accomplish-
 ment of it as one of the chief felicities at-
 tendant on a fortunate man. But how much
 more magnanimous, how much more bene-
 ficial to mankind, is forgiveness ! it is more
 magnanimous, because every generous and
 exalted disposition of the human mind is re-
 quisite to the practice of it : for these alone
 can enable us to bear the wrongs and insults
 of wickedness and folly with patience, and
 to look down on the perpetrators of them
 with pity, rather than indignation ; these
 alone can teach us, that such are but a part
 of those sufferings allotted to us in that state
 of probation, and to know, that to overcome
 evil with good, is the most glorious of all

victories: it is the most beneficial, because this amiable conduct alone can put an end to an eternal succession of injuries and retaliations; for every retaliation becomes a new injury, and requires another act of revenge for satisfaction. But would we observe this salutary precept, to love our enemies, and to do good to those who despitefully use us, this obstinate benevolence would at last conquer the most inveterate hearts, and we should have no enemies to forgive. How much more exalted a character therefore is a christian martyr, suffering with resignation, and praying for the guilty, than that of a Pagan hero, breathing revenge, and destroying the innocent! Yet noble and useful as this virtue is, before the appearance of this religion it was not only unpractised, but decried in principle as mean and ignominious, though so obvious a remedy for most of the miseries of this life, and so necessary a qualification for the happiness of another.

“A third precept, first noticed and first enjoined by this institution, is charity to all men. What this is, we may best learn from

this admirable description, painted in the following words : ‘ Charity suffereth long
 ‘ and is kind ; charity envieth not ; charity
 ‘ vaunteth not itself ; is not puffed up ; doth
 ‘ not behave itself unseemly ; seeketh not
 ‘ her own ; is not easily provoked ; think-
 ‘ eth no evil ; rejoiceth not in iniquity, but
 ‘ rejoiceth in truth ; beareth all things ;
 ‘ believeth all things ; hopeth all things ; en-
 ‘ dureth all things.’ Here we have an
 accurate delineation of this bright constella-
 tion of all virtues ; which consists not, as
 many imagine, in the building of monaste-
 ries, endowment of hospitals, or the distri-
 bution of alms ; but in such an amiable dis-
 position of mind, as exercises itself every
 hour in acts of kindness, patience, compla-
 cency, and benevolence to all around us,
 and which alone is able to promote happi-
 ness in the present life, or render us capable
 of receiving it in another : and yet this is
 totally new, and so it is declared to be by
 the author of it : ‘ A new commandment I
 ‘ give unto you, that ye love one another ;

‘ as I have loved you, that ye also love one
 ‘ another ; by this shall all men know that
 ‘ ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to
 ‘ another.’* This benevolent disposition
 is made the great characteristic of a christi-
 an, the test of his obedience, and the mark
 by which he is to be distinguished. This love
 for each other is that charity just now
 described, and contains all those qualities,
 which are there attributed to it ; humility,
 patience, meekness, and beneficence : with-
 out which we must live in perpetual discord,
 and consequently cannot pay obedience to
 this commandment by loving one another ;
 a commandment so sublime, so rational,
 and so beneficial, so wisely calculated to cor-
 rect the depravity, diminish the wickedness,
 and abate the miseries of human nature, that
 did we universally comply with it, we should
 soon be relieved from all the inquietudes,
 arising from our own unruly passions, anger,
 envy, revenge, malice, and ambition, as well
 as from all those injuries to which we are
 perpetually exposed from the indulgence of

the same passions in others. It would also preserve our minds in such a state of tranquillity, and so prepare them for the kingdom of heaven, that we should slide out of a life of peace, love and benevolence, into that celestial society, by an almost imperceptible transition. Yet was this commandment entirely new, when given by him, who so entitles it, and has made it the capital duty of his religion, because the most indispensably necessary to the attainment of its great object, the kingdom of heaven; into which if proud, turbulent, and vindictive spirits were permitted to enter, they must unavoidably destroy the happiness of that state by the operations of the same passions and vices, by which they disturb the present; and therefore all such must be eternally excluded, not only as a punishment, but also from incapacity.

“ Repentance, by this we plainly see, is another new moral duty strenuously insisted on by this religion, and by no other, because absolutely necessary to the accomplishment of its end; for this alone can purge us from those transgressions from which we cannot be

totally exempted in this state of trial and temptation, and purify us from that depravity in our nature, which renders us incapable of attaining this end. Hence also we may learn, that 'no repentance can remove this incapacity, but such as entirely changes the nature and disposition of the offender ; which, in the language of scripture, is called ' being born again.' Mere contrition for his past crimes, nor even the pardon of them, cannot effect this, unless it operates to this entire conversion or new birth, as it is properly and emphatically named : for sorrow can no more purify a mind corrupted by a long continuance in vicious habits, than it can restore health to a body disordered by a long course of vice and intemperance. Hence also every one, who is in the least acquainted with himself, may judge of the reasonableness of the hope that is in him, and of his situation in a future state by that of his present. If he feels in himself a temper proud, turbulent, vindictive, and malevolent, and a violent attachment to the pleasures or business of the world, he may be assured, that he must be excluded from the

kingdom of heaven ; not only because his conduct can merit no such reward, but because, if admitted, he would find there, no objects satisfactory to his passions, inclinations, and pursuits, and therefore could only disturb the happiness of others without enjoying any share of it himself.

“ Faith is another moral duty enjoined by this institution, of a species so new, that the philosophers of antiquity had no word expressive of this idea, nor any such idea to be expressed ; for the word *fides*, which we translate faith, was never used by any Pagan writer in a sense the least similar to that, to which it is applied in the New Testament : where in general it signifies an humble, teachable, and candid disposition, a trust in God, and confidence in his promise ; when applied particularly to christianity, it means no more than a belief of this single proposition, that Christ was the son of God ; that is, in the language of those writings, the Messiah, who was foretold by the prophets, and expected by the Jews ; who was sent by God into the world to preach righteousness, judgment, and everlasting life, and to die as

an atonement for the sins of mankind. This was all that Christ required to be believed by those who were willing to become his disciples : he who does not believe this, is not a christian, and he who does, believes the whole that is essential to his profession, and all that is properly comprehended under the name of faith. This unfortunate word has indeed been so tortured and so misapplied to mean every absurdity, which artifice could impose upon ignorance, that it has lost all pretensions to the title of virtue ; but if brought back to the simplicity of its original signification, it will deserve that name, because it usually arises from the most amiable dispositions, and is always a direct contrast to pride, obstinacy, and self-conceit. If taken in the extensive sense of an assent to the evidence of things not seen, it comprehends the existence of a God, and a future state, and is therefore not only itself a moral virtue, but the source from whence all others must proceed ; for on the belief of these all religion and morality must entirely depend. It cannot be altogether void of

moral merit, (as some would represent it) because it is in a degree voluntary ; for daily experience shews us, that men not only pretend to, but actually do believe and disbelieve almost any propositions which best suit their interests or inclinations, and unfeignedly change their sincere opinions with their situations and circumstances. For we have power over the mind's eye, as well as over the body's, to shut it against the strongest rays of truth and religion, whenever they become painful to us, and to open it again to the faint glimmerings of scepticism and infidelity when we ' love darkness rather than ' light, because our deeds are evil.' And this, I think, sufficiently refutes all objections to the moral nature of faith, drawn from the supposition of its being quite involuntary, and necessarily dependent on the degree of evidence, which is offered to our understandings.

“ Self-abasement is another moral duty inculcated by this religion only ; which requires us to impute even our own virtues to

the grace and favour of our Creator, and to acknowledge, that we can do nothing good by our own powers, unless assisted by his over-ruling influence. This doctrine seems at first sight to infringe on our free-will, and to deprive us of all merit ; but, on a closer examination, the truth of it may be demonstrated both by reason and experience, and that in fact it does not impair the one, or depreciate the other : and that it is productive of so much humility, resignation, and dependance on God, that it justly claims a place amongst the most illustrious moral virtues. Yet was this duty utterly repugnant to the proud and self-sufficient principles of the ancient philosophers as well as modern Deists, and therefore before the publication of the gospel totally unknown and uncomprehended,

“ Detachment from the world is another moral virtue constituted by this religion alone : so new, that even at this day few of its professors can be persuaded, that it is required, or that it is any virtue at all. By this detachment from the world is not to be understood a seclusion from society, ab-

straction from all business, or retirement to a gloomy cloyster. Industry and labour, cheerfulness and hospitality are frequently recommended : nor is the acquisition of wealth and honours prohibited, if they can be obtained by honest means, and a moderate degree of attention and care : but such an unremitted anxiety, and perpetual application as engrosses our whole time and thoughts, are forbid, because they are incompatible with the spirit of this religion, and must utterly disqualify us for the attainment of its great end. We toil on in the vain pursuits and frivolous occupations of the world, die in our harness, and then expect, if no gigantic crime stands in the way, to step immediately into the kingdom of heaven : but this is impossible; for without a previous detachment from the business of this world, we cannot be prepared for the happiness of another. Yet this could make no part of the morality of Pagans, because their virtues were altogether connected with this business, and consisted chiefly in conducting it with honour to themselves, and benefit to the public ; but christianity has a nobler object

in view, which, if not attended to, must be lost for ever. This object is that celestial mansion of which we should never lose sight and to which we should ever be advancing during our journey through life : but this by no means precludes us from performing the business, or enjoying the amusements of travellers, provided they detain us not too long, or lead us too far out of our way.

“ It cannot be denied, that the great author of the christian institution, first and singly ventured to oppose all the chief principles of Pagan virtue, and to introduce a religion directly opposite to those erroneous though long-established opinions, both in its duties and in its object. The most celebrated virtues of the ancients were high spirits, intrepid courage, and implacable resentment.

Impiger, iracundus, inexorabilis, acer.

was the portrait of the most illustrious hero, drawn by one of the first poets of antiquity. To all these admired qualities, those of a true christian are an exact contrast ; for this religion constantly enjoins poorness of spirit

meekness, patience and forgiveness of injuries. ‘ But I say unto you, that ye resist
 ‘ not evil ; but whoever shall smite thee on
 ‘ the right cheek, turn to him the other
 ‘ also.’² The favourite characters among the Pagans were the turbulent, ambitious, and intrepid, who through toils and dangers acquired wealth, and spent it in luxury, magnificence, and corruption; but both these are equally averse to the christian system which forbids all extraordinary efforts to obtain wealth, care to secure, or thought concerning the enjoyment of it. ‘ Lay not up for yourselves treasures on earth, &c.
 ‘ Take no thought, saying what shall we
 ‘ eat, or what shall we drink, or where-
 ‘ withal shall we be cloathed? for after
 ‘ after all these things do the Gentiles seek.’² The chief object of the Pagans was immortal fame : for this their poets sang, their heroes fought, and their patriots died ; and this was hung out by their philosophers and legislators, as the great incitement to all noble and virtuous deeds. But what says the

(2) Matt. v. 39.

(2) Matt. vi. 32.

christian legislator to his disciples on this subject? ‘Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and shall say all manner of evil against you, for my sake rejoice, and be exceeding glad, for great is your reward in heaven.’^b So widely different is the genius of the Pagan and Christian morality, that I will venture to affirm, that the most celebrated virtues of the former are most opposite to the spirit, and more inconsistent with the end of the latter, than even their most infamous vices; and that a Brutus wrenching vengeance out of his hands to whom alone it belongs, by murdering the oppressor of his country, or a Cato murdering himself from an impatience of controul, leaves the world more unqualified for, and more inadmissible into the kingdom of heaven, than even a Messalina, or an Heliogabalus, with all their profligacy about them.

“Nothing, I believe has so much contributed to corrupt the true spirit of the Christian institution, as that partiality, which we contract from our earliest education for the manners of Pagan antiquity: from whence

(b) Matt. v. xi.

we learn to adopt every moral idea, which is repugnant to it; to applaud false virtues, which that disavows; to be guided by laws of honour, which that abhors; to imitate characters, which that detests: and to behold heroes, patriots, conquerors, and suicides with admiration, whose conduct that utterly condemns. From a coalition of these opposite principles was generated that monstrous system of cruelty and benevolence, of barbarism and civility, of rapine and justice, of fighting and devotion, of revenge and generosity, which harraſſed the world for ſeveral centuries with cruſades, holy wars, knight-errantry, and ſingle combats, and even ſtill retains influence enough, under the name of honour, to defeat the moſt beneficent ends of this holy institution. I mean not by this to paſs any cenſure on the principles of valour patriotiſm, or honour: they may be uſeful, and perhaps neceſſary, in the commerce and buſineſs of the preſent turbulent and imperfect ſtate; and thoſe who are actuated by them may be virtuous, honeſt, and even religious men: all that I aſſert is, that they cannot be chriſtians. A profligate

may be a christian, though a bad one, because he may be overpowered by passions and temptations, and his actions may contradict his principles; but a man, whose ruling principle is honour, however virtuous he may be, cannot be a christian, because he erects a standard of duty, and deliberately adheres to it, diametrically opposite to the whole tenour of that religion.

“ The contrast between a christian, and all other institutions religious or moral, previous to its appearance, is sufficiently evident, and surely the superiority of the former is as little to be disputed; unless any one shall undertake to prove, that humility, patience, forgiveness, and benevolence are less amiable, and less beneficial qualities, than pride, turbulence, revenge, and malignity: that the contempt of riches is less noble, than the acquisition by fraud and villainy, or the distribution of them to the poor, less commendable than avarice or profusion; or that a real immortality in the kingdom of heaven is an object less exalted, less rational, and less worthy of pursuit, than an imaginary immortality in the applause of men:

that worthless tribute, which the folly of one part of mankind pays to the wickedness of the other ; a tribute, which a wise man ought always to despise, because a good man can scarce ever obtain."

C O N C L U S I O N.

" **I**F I mistake not, I have now fully established the truth of my three propositions.

" First, That there is now extant a book intituled the New Testament.

" Secondly, That from this book may be extracted a system of religion entirely new ; both in its object, and its doctrines, not only superior to, but totally unlike, every thing, which had ever before entered into the mind of man.

" Thirdly, That from this book may likewise be collected a system of ethics, in which every moral precept founded on reason is

carried to a higher degree of purity and perfection, than in any other of the wisest philosophers of preceding ages; every moral precept founded on false principles totally omitted, and many new precepts added, peculiarly corresponding with the new object of this religion.

“ Every one of these propositions, I am persuaded, is incontrovertibly true; and if true, this short but certain conclusion must inevitably follow; that such a system of religion and morality could not possibly have been the work of any man, or set of men, much less of those obscure, ignorant and illiterate persons who actually did discover, and publish it to the world; and that therefore it must have been effected by the supernatural interposition of divine power and wisdom; that is, that it must derive its origin from God.

“ This argument seems to me little short of demonstration, and is indeed founded on the very same reasoning, by which the material world is proved to be the work of his invisible hand. We view with admiration the heavens and the earth, and all therein con-

tained ; we contemplate with amazement the minute bodies of animals too small for perception, and the immense planetary orbs too vast for imagination : We are certain that these cannot be the works of man ; and therefore we conclude with reason, that they must be the productions of an omnipotent Creator. In the same manner we see here a scheme of religion and morality unlike and superior to all ideas of the human mind, equally impossible to have been discovered by the knowledge, as invented by the artifice of man ; and therefore by the very same mode of reasoning, and with the same justice, we conclude, that it must derive its origin from the same omnipotent and omniscient Being.

“Nor was the propagation of this religion less extraordinary than the religion itself, or less above the reach of all human power, than the discovery of it was above that of all human understanding. It is well known, that in the course of a very few years it was spread over all the principal parts of Asia and of Europe, and this by the ministry only of an inconsiderable number of the most

inconsiderable persons ; that at this time Paganism was in the highest repute, believed universally by the vulgar, and patronised by the great ; that the wisest men of the wisest nations assisted at its sacrifices, and consulted its oracles on the most important occasions : Whether these were the tricks of the priests or of the devil, is of no consequence, as they were both equally unlikely to be converted, or overcome ; the fact is certain, that on the preaching of a few fishermen, their altars were deserted, and their deities were dumb. This miracle they undoubtedly performed, whatever we may think of the rest ; and this is surely sufficient to prove the authority of their commission ; and to convince us, that neither their undertaking nor the execution of it could possibly be their own.

“ How much this divine institution has been corrupted, or how soon these corruptions began, how far it has been discoloured by the false notions of illiterate ages, or blended with fictions by pious frauds, or how early these notions and fictions were introduced,

no learning or sagacity is now able precisely to ascertain ; but surely no man, who seriously considers the excellence and novelty of its doctrines, the manner in which it was at first propagated through the world, the persons who atchieved that wonderful work, and the originality of those writings in which it is still recorded, can possibly believe that it could ever have been the production of imposture, or chance ; or that from an imposture the most wicked and blasphemous (for if an imposture, such it is) all the religion and virtue now existing on earth can derive their source.

“ But notwithstanding what has been here urged, if any man can believe, that at a time when the literature of Greece and Rome, then in their meridian lustre, were insufficient for the task, the son of a carpenter, together with twelve of the meanest and most illiterate mechanics, his associates, unassisted by any supernatural power, should be able to discover or invent a system of theology the most sublime, and of ethics the most perfect, which had escaped the penetration and learning of Plato, Aristotle, and Cicero ; and

that from this system, by their own sagacity, they had excluded every false virtue, though universally admired, and admitted every true virtue, though despised and ridiculed by all the rest of the world : If any one can believe that these men could become impostors, for no other purpose than the propagation of truth, villains for no end but to teach honesty, and martyrs without the least prospect of honour or advantage ; or that, if all this should have been possible, these few inconsiderable persons should have been able, in the course of a few years, to have spread this their religion over most parts of the then known world, in opposition to the interests, pleasures, ambition, prejudices, and even reason of mankind ; to have triumphed over the power of princes, the intrigues of states, the force of custom, the blindness of zeal, the influence of priests, the arguments of orators, and the philosophy of the world, without any supernatural assistance ; if any one can believe all these miraculous events, contradictory to the constant experience of the powers and dispositions of human nature, he must be possessed of much more faith

than is necessary to make him a christian, and remain an unbeliever from mere credulity.

“ But should these credulous infidels after all be in the right, and this pretended revelation be all a fable; from believing it what harm could ensue? Would it render princes more tyrannical, or subjects more ungovernable? The rich more insolent, or the poor more disorderly? Would it make worse parents or children, husbands or wives, masters or servants, friends or neighbours? Or would it not make men more virtuous, and consequently more happy in every situation? It could not be criminal; it could not be detrimental. It could not be criminal, because it cannot be a crime to assent to such evidence, as has been able to convince the best and wisest of mankind; by which, if false, providence must have permitted men to deceive each other, for the most beneficial ends, and which therefore it would be surely more meritorious to believe, from a disposition of faith and charity, which believeth all things, than to reject with scorn from obstinacy and self-conceit: It cannot be detrimental, be-

cause if christianity is a fable, it is a fable, the belief of which is the only principle which can retain men in a steady and uniform course of virtue, piety and devotion, or can support them in the hour of distress, of sickness, and of death. Whatever might be the operations of true deism on the minds of Pagan philosophers, that can now avail us nothing: for that light which once lightened the Gentiles, is now absorbed in the brighter illumination of the gospel: we can now form no rational system of deism, but what must be borrowed from that source, and, as far as it reaches towards perfection, must be exactly the same; and therefore if we will not accept of christianity, we can have no religion at all. Accordingly we see that those who fly from this, scarce ever stop at deism; but hasten on with great alacrity to a total rejection of all religious and moral principles whatever."

That this religion is highly conducive to our happiness even in this world, is a truth which cannot, I think, be reasonably doubted; "for it is trite objection, and grounded

on a misapprehension of the design of christianity, which would represent it as an intolerable yoke, so opposite to the propensities, as to be utterly destructive of the felicity of the human mind. It is, in truth, quite the reverse; there is not a precept in the gospel, without a single exception, which is not calculated to promote our happiness. Christianity regulates, but does not extinguish our affections; and in the due regulation of our affections consists our happiness as reasonable beings. If there is one condition in this life more happy than another, it is, surely, that of him who founds all his hope of futurity on the promises of the gospel; who carefully endeavours to conform his actions to its precepts; looking upon the great God Almighty as his protector here, his rewarder hereafter, and his everlasting preserver.—This is a frame of mind so perfective of our nature, that if christianity, from a belief of which it can only be derived, was as certainly false, as it is certainly true, one could not help wishing that it might be universally received in the world.”^c

These arguments in support of the divine origin of the christian religion, drawn from internal evidence afforded by the religion itself, appear to me to be such, as no sophistry can entangle, nor subtilty confute; they are, in truth, little more than a plain statement of facts, the conclusion from which is, I think, as unavoidable, as the the facts themselves are undeniable; but it is not upon internal evidence only, that we found our belief of the divine origin of the christian religion; other evidences of, perhaps, equal weight, are not wanting to prove the same fact, among which, the fulfillment of the prophecies recorded in the holy scriptures, and the miracles therein alledged to have been performed by Jesus Christ and his apostles, in support of their divine authority, are those which appear to be the most weighty. On both these subjects I purpose making a few observations, and shall begin with the former.

An event so connected with the religion, and with the fortunes of the Jewish people, as one of their race, one born amongst

them, establishing his authority and his law throughout a great portion of the civilized world, it was perhaps to be expected, should be noticed in the prophetic writings of that nation. Accordingly we perceive in these writings, various intimations and predictions *concurring* in the person and history of Jesus, in a manner and degree, in which passages taken from these books, could not be made to concur, in any person except him, who has been the author of great changes in the affairs and opinions of mankind. In one of these books,^d purporting to contain the predictions of a writer who lived seven centuries before the christian æra, we find the following passages.

“ Behold, my servant shall deal prudently, he shall be exalted, and extolled, and be very high. As many were astonished at thee ; (his visage was so marred more than any man, and his form more than the sons of men :) so shall he sprinkle many nations ; the kings shall shut their mouths at him : for that which had not been told them shall they see ;

(d) Is. lii. 13. liii.

and that which they have not heard shall they consider. Who hath believed our report ? and to whom is the arm of the Lord revealed ? For he shall grow up before him as a tender plant, and as a root out of a dry ground : he hath no form nor comeliness ; and when we shall see him, there is no beauty that we should desire him. He is despised and rejected of men, a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief : and we hid, as it were, our faces from him ; he was despised, and we esteemed him not. Surely he hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows : yet we did esteem him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted. But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities : the chastisement of our peace was upon him ; and with his stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray ; we have turned every one to his own way ; and the Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all. He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth : he is brought as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so he openeth not his mouth. He was taken from

32 PREFATORY OBSERVATIONS, &c.

prison and from judgment ; and who shall declare his generation ? for he was cut off out of the land of the living : for the transgression of my people was he stricken. And he made his grave with the wicked, and with the rich in his death ; because he had done no violence, neither was there any deceit in his mouth. Yet it pleased the Lord to bruise him ; he hath put him to grief. When thou shalt make his soul an offering for sin, he shall see his seed, he shall prolong his days, and the pleasure of the Lord shall prosper in his hand. He shall see of the travail of his soul, and shall be satisfied : by his knowledge shall my righteous servant justify many ; for he shall bear their iniquities. Therefore will I divide him a portion with the great, and he shall divide the spoil with the strong ; because he hath poured out his soul unto death : and he was numbered with the transgressors ; and he bare the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors."

That material part of every argument from prophecy, namely, that the words alleged, were actually spoken or written be-

fore the fact, to which they applied, took place, or could by any natural means be foreseen, is in the present instance, incontestible. The record comes out of the hands of adversaries, the Jews ; and what adds to the force of the quotation, is, that it is taken from a writing *declaredly prophetic*.

The events which form the subject of this prophecy are of such a peculiar nature; the circumstances so inapplicable to every other series of events, and related with such particularity and wonderful precision, that to attribute its completion to the power of chance, or to the accommodating ingenuity of the friends of christianity, would be alike unreasonable. The application of this prophecy to the evangelic history is plain and appropriate. Here is no double sense ; no figurative language but what is sufficiently intelligible to every reader of every country. It is intermixed with no other subject, but is manifestly directed to one character, and one scene of things.

As an admission of this application of the prophecy by the Jews would at once be fa-

tal to the religious opinions of that people, their modern expositors (*for we have good proof that the antient Rabbins explained it of their expected Messiah,*) concur, I think, in representing it as a description of the calamitous state, and intended restoration, of the Jewish people, who are here, as they say, exhibited under the character of a single person ; but (to say nothing of the inadmissibility of figurative, in a case which plainly admits of a literal construction,) there are so many insuperable difficulties attending this view of the prophecy, that their persisting in it can only be attributed to the obstinacy which has so remarkably distinguished that people. But even of this objection (weak and ill-founded as it is) the Deist cannot avail himself, for whether the prophecy was completed in the person of Jesus Christ, or in the afflictions of the Jews, is to him matter of indifference, as either would be equally fatal to his opinions:—the question with him is not in *what* manner the prophecy was completed, but whether it was fulfilled in *any* manner or not.

There are other prophecies of the Old Testament, interpreted by christians to relate to the gospel history, which are deserving both of regard, and of a very attentive consideration;^e but I content myself with stating the above, because I think it the clearest and the strongest of all, and because most of the rest, in order that their value be represented with any tolerable degree of fidelity, require a discussion unsuitable to the limits of this work.^f

Leaving the reader to draw his own conclusions from the preceding prophecy, and what has been observed respecting it, I shall close this part of the subject, with laying before him the opinion of an author already quoted, relative to these and other predictions in the sacred writings.

(e) The reader may find them disposed in order, and distinctly explained in Bishop Chandler's Treatise upon the subject.

(f) For the principal part of the preceding observations on Prophecy, see Paley's "Evidences of Christianity," which is, probably without exception, the most clear and satisfactory statement of the historical proofs of the Christian Religion, ever exhibited in any age or country.

“ Prophecies are permanent miracles, whose authority is sufficiently confirmed by their completion, and are therefore solid proofs of the supernatural origin of a religion, whose truth they were intended to testify ; such are those to be found in various parts of the scriptures relative to the coming of the Messiah, the destruction of Jerusalem, and the unexampled state in which the Jews have ever since continued, all so circumstantially descriptive of the events, that they seem rather histories of past, than predictions of future transactions ; and whoever will seriously consider the immense distance of time between some of them and the events which they foretell, the uninterrupted chain by which they are connected for many thousand years, how exactly they correspond with those events, and how totally unapplicable they are to all others in the history of mankind ; I say, whoever considers these circumstances, he will scarcely be persuaded to believe that they can be the productions of preceding artifice, or posterior application, or can entertain the least

doubt of their being derived from supernatural inspiration.” 6

Let us now take a cursory view of that species of evidence against which the enemies of christianity have long pointed the whole of their artillery, viz. the miracles recorded in the New Testament, as having been performed by Jesus Christ and his apostles.

The principal ground upon which these miracles have been attacked, is their alleged incredibility, which a modern objector considers to be such, “that no human testimony can in any case render them credible.” This objection, however, has been so ably combated, and, in my opinion, completely silenced by a writer before quoted, as to render any further answer unnecessary.

He says, “I deem it unnecessary to prove that mankind stood in need of a revelation, because I have met with no serious person who thinks that even under the christian dispensation we have too much light, or any assurance which is superfluous. I desire moreover that

in judging of christianity it may be remembered, that the question lies between this religion and none : for if the christian religion be not credible, no one, with whom we have to do, will support the pretensions of any other.

“ Suppose then the world we live in to have had a Creator : suppose it to appear from the predominant aim and tendency of the provisions and contrivances observable in the universe, that the Deity, when he formed it, consulted for the happiness of his sensitive creation ; suppose the disposition which dictated this council to continue ; suppose a part of the creation to have received faculties from their Maker, by which they are capable of rendering a moral obedience to his will, and of voluntarily pursuing any end for which he has designed them ; suppose the Creator to intend for these his rational and accountable agents a second state of existence, in which their situation will be regulated by their behaviour in the first state, by which supposition (and by no other) the objection to the Divine government in not putting a difference between

the good and the bad, and the inconsistency of this confusion, with the care and benevolence discoverable in the works of the Deity is done away ; suppose it to be of the utmost importance to the subjects of this dispensation to know what is intended for them, that is, suppose the knowledge of it to be highly conducive to the happiness of the species, a purpose which so many provisions of nature are calculated to promote : Suppose, nevertheless, almost the whole race, either by the imperfection of their faculties, the misfortune of their situation, or by the loss of some prior revelation, to want this knowledge, and not to be likely without the aid of a new revelation to attain it ; under these circumstances is it improbable that a revelation should be made ? Is it incredible that God should interpose for such a purpose ? Suppose him to design for mankind a future state, is it unlikely that he should acquaint them with it ?

“ Now in what way can a revelation be made but by miracles ? In none which we are able to conceive. Consequently, in what-

ever degree it is probable, or not very improbable, that a revelation should be communicated to mankind at all, in the same degree is it probable, or not very improbable that miracles should be wrought. Therefore when miracles are related to have been wrought in the promulgating of a revelation manifestly wanted, and, if true, of inestimable value, the improbability which arises from the miraculous nature of the things related, is not greater than the original improbability that such a revelation should be imparted by God.

“I wish it however to be correctly understood, in what manner, and to what extent, this argument is alledged. We do not assume the attributes of the Deity, or the existence of a future state, in order to *prove* the reality of miracles. That reality always must be proved by evidence. We assert only that in miracles adduced in support of revelation, there is not any such antecedent improbability as no testimony can surmount.” This is the prejudication we would resist, and I think the reflection above stated, that, if there be a revelation, there must

be miracles ; and that under the circumstances in which the human species are placed, a revelation is not improbable, or not improbable in any great degree, to be a fair answer to the whole objection.

“ But since it is an objection which stands in the very threshold of our argument, and, if admitted, is a bar to every proof, and to all future reasoning upon the subject, it may be necessary, before we proceed farther, to examine the principle upon which it professes to be founded: which principle is concisely this, that it is contrary to experience that a miracle should be true, but not contrary to experience that testimony should be false.

“ Now there appears a small ambiguity in the term “ experience,” and in the phrases “ contrary to experience,” or “ contradicting experience,” which it may be necessary to remove in the first place. Strictly speaking, the narrative of a fact is *then* only contrary to experience, when the fact is related to have existed at a time and a place, at which time and place we being present, did not perceive it to exist ; as if it should be asserted, that in

a particular room, and at a particular hour of a certain day, a man was raised from the dead, in which room, and at the time specified, we being present and looking on, perceived no such event to have taken place. Here the assertion is contrary to experience properly so called; and this is a contrariety which no evidence can surmount. It matters nothing, whether the fact be of a miraculous nature or not. But although this be the experience, and the contrariety, which archbishop Tillotson alledged in the quotation with which Mr. Hume opens his essay, it is certainly not that experience, nor that contrariety, which Mr. Hume himself intended to object. And, short of this, I know no intelligible signification which can be affixed to the term "contrary to experience," but one, viz. that of not having ourselves experienced any thing similar to the things related, or such things not being generally experienced by others. I say not "generally," for to state concerning the fact in question, that no such thing was *ever* experienced, or that *universal* experience is against it, is to assume the subject of the controversy.

“ Now the improbability which arises from the want (for this properly is a want, not a contradiction,) of experience, is only equal to the probability there is, that if the thing were true, we should experience things similar to it, or that such things would be generally experienced. Suppose it then to be true, that miracles were wrought upon the first promulgation of christianity, when nothing but miracles could decide its authority, is it certain that such miracles would be repeated so often, and in so many places, as to become objects of general experience? Is it a probability approaching to certainty? Is it a probability of any great strength or force? Is it such as no evidence can encounter? And yet this probability is the exact converse, and therefore the exact measure of the improbability which arises from the want of experience, and which Mr. Hume represents as invincible by human testimony.

“ It is not like alledging a new law of nature, or a new experiment in natural philosophy, because, when these are related, it is expected that, under the same circumstances, the same effect will follow universally ;

and in proportion as this expectation is justly entertained, the want of a corresponding experience negatives the history. But to expect concerning a miracle, that it should succeed upon repetition, is to expect that which would make it cease to be a miracle, which is contrary to its nature as such, and would totally destroy the use and purpose for which it was wrought.

“ The force of experience as an objection to miracles, is founded in the presumption, either that the course of nature is invariable, or that, if it be ever varied, variations will be frequent and general. Has the necessity of this alternative been demonstrated? Permit us to call the course of nature the agency of an intelligent being, and is there any good reason for judging this state of the case to be probable? Ought we not rather to expect, that such a Being, upon occasions of peculiar importance, may interrupt the order which he had appointed, yet, that such occasions should return seldom : that these interruptions consequently should be confined to the experience of a few ; that the

want of it, therefore, in many, should be matter neither of surprize nor objection ?

“ But as a continuation of the argument from experience it is said, that, when we advance accounts of miracles, we assign effects without causes, or we attribute effects to causes inadequate to the purpose, or to causes, of the operations of which we have no experience. Of what causes, we may ask, and of what effects does the objection speak ? If it be answered that, when we ascribe the cure of the palsy to a touch, of blindness, to the anointing of the eyes with clay, or the raising of the dead to a word, we lay ourselves open to this imputation, we reply that we ascribe no such effects to such causes. We perceive no virtue or energy in these things more than in other things of the same kind. They are merely signs to connect the miracle with its end. The effect we ascribe simply to the volition of the Deity ; of whose existence and power, not to say of whose presence and agency, we have previous and independent proof. We have therefore all we seek for in the works of rational agents, a sufficient power, and an adequate motive. In

a word, once believe that there is a God, and miracles are not incredible.

“ Mr. Hume states the case of miracles to be a contest of opposite improbabilities, that is to say, a question whether it be more improbable that the miracle should be true, or the testimony false ; and this I think a fair account of the controversy. But herein I remark a want of argumentative justice, that, in describing the improbability of miracles, he suppresses all those circumstances of extenuation which result from our knowledge of the existence, power, and disposition of the Deity, his concern in the creation, the end answered by the miracle, the importance of that end, and its subserviency to the plan pursued in the works of nature. As Mr. Hume has represented the question, miracles are alike incredible to him who is previously assured of the constant agency of a Divine Being, and to him who believes that no such being exists in the universe. They are equally incredible, whether related to have been wrought, upon occasions the most deserving, and for purposes the most beneficial, or for

no assignable end whatever, or for an end confessedly trifling or pernicious. This surely cannot be a correct statement. In adjusting also the other side of the balance, the strength and weight of testimony, this author has provided an answer to every possible accumulation of historical proof by telling us, that we are not obliged to explain how the story or the evidence arose. Now I think we *are* obliged ; not, perhaps, to shew by positive accounts how it did, but by a probable hypothesis how it might so happen. The existence of the testimony is a phenomenon. The truth of the fact solves the phenomenon. If we reject this solution we ought to have some other to rest in : and none even by our adversaries can be admitted, which is not inconsistent with the principles that regulate human affairs and human conduct at present, or which makes men *then* to have been a different kind of beings from what they are now.

“ But the short consideration which, independently of every other, convinces me that there is no solid foundation in Mr. Hume’s

conclusion is the following. When a theorem is proposed to a mathematician, the first thing he does with it is to try it upon a simple case ; and if it produce a false result, he is sure that there must be some mistake in the demonstration. Now to proceed in this way with what may be called Mr. Hume's theorem. If twelve men, whose probity and good sense I had long known, should seriously and circumstantially relate to me an account of a miracle wrought before their eyes, and in which it was impossible that they should be deceived ; if the governor of the country, hearing a rumour of this account, should call these men into his presence, and offer them a short proposal, either to confess the imposture, or submit to be tied up to a gibbet ; if they should refuse with one voice to acknowledge that there existed any falsehood or imposture in the case ; if this threat were communicated to them separately, yet with no different effect ; if it was at last executed ; if I myself saw them, one after another, consenting to be racked, burnt, or strangled, rather than give up the truth of their account : still, if Mr. Hume's rule be

my guide, I am not to believe them. Now I undertake to say, that there exists not a sceptic in the world, who would not believe them; or, who would defend such incredulity."^h

Enough, it is presumed, having been said to shew the fallacy of the principle laid down by Mr. Hume, I shall now proceed to make a few observations on the peculiar nature of the christian miracles, and the circumstances attending them, and, in the result, endeavour to shew, that there is not merely a possibility that these miraculous facts *may* be true, but that we have very strong reasons for believing they actually *are* so.

In considering the degree of credibility to which the miracles in question are intitled it should be recollected that they were not like the tricks of a juggler, of a useless or mischievous tendency, but that, with two

(h) For the preceding observations on miracles, see Paley's *Evidences*.

exceptions,ⁱ they were all acts of mercy and benevolence, performed for the accomplishment of a most important object, and peculiarly correspondent therewith ;—That some of the persons who profess themselves to be original witnesses of these miraculous facts, were themselves, it appears, recorders of the transactions :^k—That these witnesses

(i) These exceptions are, the permission to the devils to enter the herd of swine, and the withering of the barren fig-tree—on which subjects, see the different commentators.

(k) The received author of the Gospel according to St. Matthew, was an original Apostle, and emissary of the religion. The received author of the Gospel according to St. Mark, was an inhabitant of Jerusalem at the time, to whose house the Apostles were in the habit of resorting, and was himself, an attendant upon one of the most eminent of that number. The received author of the Gospel according to St. Luke, was a stated companion, and fellow-traveller, of the most active of all the teachers of the religion, and, in the course of his travels, frequently in the society of the original Apostles ; and the received author of the Gospel according to St. John, was, as well as the first, one of these Apostles. The Acts of the Apostles, purport to have been written by Luke, the person who wrote the Gospel bearing that name.

These four Gospels, the Acts of the Apostles, thirteen Epistles of St. Paul, the first Epistle of John, and the first of Peter, were received, without doubt, by those who doubted concerning the other books, which are included

were men of good sense and sound understandings, as their writings sufficiently testify, and as capable of deciding on the reality of these miracles, as we ourselves should be, under the same circumstances :—That the miracles were so many, of such various kinds, and were so invariably performed, whenever attempted,¹ that they could neither have been the effects of chance, nor the result of fortunate experiment :—That they were performed, it appears, in open

in our present canon.—By the term “received,” I mean, that they were believed to contain authentic accounts of the transactions, upon which the religion rested—were attacked by the early adversaries of christianity, as such, and were usually appealed to, by all parties, in the controversies which arose in those days. *ibid.*

(1) “One, and only one instance, may be produced, in which the DISCIPLES of Christ do seem to have attempted a cure, and not to have been able to perform it. The story is very ingeniously and candidly related by three of the Evangelists.* The patient was afterwards healed by Christ himself; and the whole transaction seems to have been intended, as it was well suited, to display the superiority of Christ, above all who performed miracles in his name; a distinction, which, during his presence in the World, it might be necessary to inculcate, by some such proof as this.” *ibid.*

* Mark ix. 14.

- day-light, indiscriminately before enemies and friends, in some instances before a few persons, and in others, before multitudes: That the story of them was published at the time and place, in which they are alledged to have been wrought, and, consequently, while the persons were yet living, on whom the miracles are said to have been performed:—That many of these miracles are of a nature, which absolutely precludes the possibility of the witnesses having been either mistaken or deceived, respecting their reality:—That in one instance, a miracle was wrought on these very witnesses themselves, and in many instances, these same witnesses performed miracles on others:—That the reality of the greater number of those miracles was, in fact, admitted by those adversaries of christianity, who lived in the earliest ages of its institution, and who possessed every means of ascertaining their truth; such adversaries having attributed their performance to magic, or the agency of evil spirits:—And lastly, it should be recollected, that “there is *satisfactory evidence*, that many, professing to be original witnes-

fes of the christian miracles, passed their lives in labours, dangers, and sufferings, voluntarily undergone, in attestation of the accounts which they delivered, and solely in consequence of their belief of those accounts; and that they also submitted, from the same motives, to new rules of conduct.”^m

(m) For the evidence in support of the above proposition, see the work last quoted.

Should it be objected, as indeed it has been, that miracles and even martyrdoms, are not peculiar to the christian institution;—that both have been alledged in support of various other religions, and religious opinions—we answer—That miracles have been so alledged, is admitted; but we deny that any of them, as to their nature, and the testimony adduced in their support, will bear a fair comparison with the christian miracles and testimony:—On the contrary, we assert, “that there is not satisfactory evidence, that persons, pretending to be original witnesses of any other similar miracles, have acted in the same manner in attestation of the accounts which they delivered, and solely in consequence of their belief of the truth of those accounts;” in support of which proposition, the reader is referred to the above work (Paley’s Evid.) for an examination of the miracles which have been brought forward, as similar to, and for the purpose of opposing, the miraculous facts recorded in the New Testament.

“ ————— I compare facts with facts, miracles with miracles; I place testimony in opposition to testimony;

I consider it unnecessary to prove, that, if the miracles in question were performed at all, they must have been performed by the power of God; because, I apprehend, no man, in the present day, is credulous enough to believe, that the devil would work miracles, to promote the cause of religion and virtue;—from the nature of the case, then, I think it unquestionably follows, that one of the four following propositions *must* be true.

First. That the persons, professing to be original witnesses of the christian miracles, were themselves mistaken, or imposed upon

and I am struck with amazement, when I discover the enormous difference between the miracles attested to me by the witnesses of whom I have spoken (meaning the christian witnesses) and the facts alledged in support of certain religious opinions." Bonnet's philosophical and critical enquiries concerning christianity, translated by Bosser.

" ——— Shall the dreams of the alchymist, induce the philosopher to reject the truths of chemistry? Because multitudes of physical and historical works are full of mistaken observations and doubtful facts, shall the attentive philosopher reject all books of physics and history? Or, will he conclude, indiscriminately, against observation and fact?" *ibid.*

respecting their reality ; and, consequently, that the miracles were not really performed.

Second. That the witnesses, knowing these pretended miracles to be false, did attempt, and succeeded in the attempt, to impose the belief of them upon mankind as true.

Third. That the whole story, so far as respects these miracles, is a fabrication of some posterior age ;—or,

Fourth. That the miracles in question, were really performed.

These four propositions I shall now proceed to examine, with as much brevity as the nature of the case will admit, and shall thence deduce such conclusions, as the premises may appear to warrant.

P R O P O S I T I O N I.

That the persons professing to be original witnesses of the christian miracles, were themselves mistaken, or imposed upon respecting their reality ; and, consequently, that the miracles were not really performed.

ON considering this proposition, there are three points which naturally present themselves for examination ; first, the nature of the miracles in question ; second, the local circumstances under which they are alledged to have been performed ; and third, the capacity of the witnesses—that is, whether the witnesses were competent judges of the reality of these miraculous facts ;—and, by an examination of these points, and only these, can the truth or falsehood of the proposition be decided on.

Of the capacity of some of the witnesses, (the apostles,) we can form an idea, sufficiently accurate for our purpose, from their writings. In these, we find a perspicuity, simplicity, and propriety, truly admirable ; a becoming warmth, without any intermix-

ture of intemperate zeal : not the least shadow of hypocrisy, nor the smallest trace of enthusiasm, can be discovered in any part of these books ; they speak, throughout, the language of the heart, and on every page is impressed the lovely image of virtue, and the majestic form of truth. That the writers of such books possessed great good sense and sound understandings, and, consequently, were fully capable of judging of the reality of these miraculous facts, cannot, I think, be doubted.

As to the nature of the miracles, of which these men professed themselves to be original witnesses, they are as various in their species, as the local circumstances under which they are said to have been performed, were different. The sick were restored to health, cripples to the use of their limbs, hearing to the deaf, speech to the dumb, sight to the blind, and life to the dead. Evil spirits were cast out, a tempest was calmed, water converted into wine, multitudes were fed with a few loaves and fishes ;—these, and many other miracles, are alledged to have been performed by Jesus Christ, in the

immediate presence of the witnesses, particularly of the apostles. But let us take a nearer view of some of these miracles—of those by which, persons born blind, were restored to sight, notorious cripples to the use of their limbs, and dead men to life. These, upon consideration, we shall perceive to be of a nature, which evidently precludes the possibility of the witnesses having been deceived, respecting their reality : the man cured or restored, is there, his former condition was known, and his present condition may be examined ;—to attempt to resolve these cases into false perception, would be to assert, that our senses are useless, and in no case to be depended upon ; but, to put the matter out of all doubt, it seems that some of these men, not only witnessed the performance of numerous miracles by their leader, but, in many instances, these same witnesses performed miracles upon others ; and not only did they perform, and witness the performance of miracles, but in one instance, a miracle is alledged to have been wrought upon these very witnesses themselves, and that, too, of a peculiar nature, and at

a public festival, or assembly of the christians.ⁿ If, before, it had been possible to entertain any thing like a doubt upon the subject;—if, notwithstanding their having performed, and witnessed the performance of miracles, it had been yet possible to suppose that the witnesses might have been the dupes of their senses, this last miracle must, I conceive, remove even the shadow of doubt;—the effects produced by it being such, as can by no possibility be resolved into an illusion of the imagination: If the witnesses suddenly found themselves capable of conversing in languages, of which, until that moment, they were wholly ignorant, they must have been as conscious and certain of the reality of the miracle thus wrought upon them, as they were of their own existence.^o

The local circumstances, under which

(n) Acts ii. 1.

(o) The resurrection of Jesus Christ might have been adduced as another instance, (if any other had been necessary,) of a miracle, respecting the reality of which, it was equally impossible that the witnesses could have been mistaken.

these miracles are said to have been performed, were as various, as the miracles in their nature were different ; and from these local circumstances, no less than from the nature of the miracles themselves, the witnesses, and particularly the apostles, must, I conceive, have possessed every imaginable opportunity of ascertaining their reality ; this appears to me so evidently the case, that to attempt to prove it, would be superfluous—I shall therefore dismiss the subject, with observing, that the connection and intercourse between Jesus Christ and some of the witnesses, was such as, in my opinion, renders it impossible that the former could have been an impostor, without the latter having been privy to the imposition.

PROPOSITION II.

That the witnesses, knowing these pretended miracles to be false, did attempt, and succeeded in the attempt, to impose the belief of them upon mankind, as true?

THIS proposition involves two distinct assertions ;—first, That the witnesses *attempted* to impose upon mankind as true, these pretended miracles, which they knew to be false ; and---second, That they *succeeded* in such attempt. It will, I think, be no difficult task, to shew that these assertions,

(p) Is it candid in modern objectors to accuse men (long since in their graves,) of a gross and scandalous imposition upon the world, not only without having the least shadow of proof to adduce in support of the charge, but of which they have, on the contrary, the greatest reason to believe them innocent ? Is it reasonable in them, living at so distant a period, to reject, as untrue, facts which were admitted by contemporaries—and by contemporaries, too, who possessed every means, and the strongest disposition, to disprove the reality of those facts, had they been false ? Yet the proposition which rejects the facts in question, and accuses the witnesses of imposition, is the only one of the three, which unbelievers attempt to maintain ; the other two, being, if possible, still more indefensible !

taken separately, are both of them unfounded ; but the disproof of either would be sufficient for my purpose, as they necessarily fall, or stand together.

It will be proper, in the first place, to consider the former of those assertions, viz. That the witnesses attempted to impose upon mankind as true, these pretended miracles, which they knew to be false.

To assist us in forming a correct opinion of this charge, permit me to state a case.... Suppose an individual, or individuals, to be accused of a crime, alledged to have been committed at a period so remote, or under such circumstances, as renders it impossible to ascertain the fact, from evidence at this time existing, there would then be no other way of deciding on the validity of the charge, than by a close investigation of the motives which might possibly have led to the commission of the act in question ; and supposing, upon such investigation, no cause or motive could be discovered, the charge would of course, be considered unfounded ; mankind, by general consent, having laid it down as an axiom, that no man intention-

ally acts wrong without a motive of some sort ;---but supposing, in the course of the inquiry, it should appear, not only that the parties accused, could not have had any motive to commit the crime imputed to them, but, on the contrary, that they must have known, from the peculiar nature of such crime, that the certain consequence of committing it, would be the sacrifice of all that was dear to them as men ; that it would inevitably subject them to great sufferings, and probably terminate in the loss of their lives ; supposing, I say, in the course of the investigation, it should appear, that the accused could not have had the smallest inducement to commit the crime alledged, but, that they had, on the contrary, the strongest reasons that men could have, to avoid it ; and, supposing it should further appear, that the crime imputed to the accused, was, in its nature, the very reverse of their general character ; supposing that---being charged with imposing upon mankind as true, certain facts which they knew to be false---the accused should appear to be men, remarkable

for their candour and integrity ; supposing, I say, in the course of the inquiry, such should appear to be the situation and character of the parties accused, I will undertake to assert, that there exists not a man in the world, unbiassed by prejudice, who would hesitate to pronounce them innocent.

Now that this is precisely the case of the witnesses to the christian miracles, at least of the apostles, can, I think, be shewn without difficulty. They are accused of having attempted to impose upon mankind as true, certain pretended miracles which they knew to be false. If, then, such was the case, if these men were impostors, they must, it appears to me, have been induced to become such, for the purpose of acquiring either worldly power, or riches ; or have been actuated by a spirit of ambition or enthusiasm.

That riches or power could not have been their object, is, I think, evident, because they would accept of neither ; but uniformly disclaimed all authority over the

persons and properties of others.⁹ That they were total strangers to ambition, appears no less certain, for these men were as remarkable for their humility, as their disinterestedness; they pursued a line of conduct which, it seems, they well knew would

(q) I do not know that it has ever been insinuated, that the christian mission, in the hands of the apostles, was a scheme for making a fortune, or for getting money. But it may, nevertheless, be proper to remark here, how perfectly free they appear to have been, from any pecuniary or interested views whatever. The most tempting opportunity, which occurred, of making a gain of their converts, was by the custody and management of the public funds, when some of the richer members, intending to contribute their fortunes to the common support of the society, sold their possessions, and laid down the prices at the apostles feet. Yet so insensible, or undesirous were they, of the advantage which that confidence afforded that, we find; they very soon disposed of the trust, by putting it into the hands, not of nominees of their own, but of stewards, formally elected for the purpose, by the society at large. Act. vi.

We may add also, that this excess of generosity, which cast private property into the public stock, was so far from being required by the apostles; or imposed as a law of christianity, that Peter reminds Ananias, that he had been guilty, in his behaviour, of an officious, and voluntary prevarication; for whilst, says he, "thy estate remained unfold; was it not thine own? and, after it was sold, was it not in thine own power." Acts v. Paley's Evid.

render them perfectly contemptible in the eyes of the world, and preached and practised a religion which was directly opposed to it; they even disclaimed the honor that might otherwise have attached to them, as the founders of a new religion, by attributing it altogether to their master, Jesus Christ; declaring, that they possessed no power or authority of their own, and that they were nothing more than humble instruments in his hands.^f That they could not have been enthusiasts, is, in my opinion, no less clear, for never were men further removed from that character, as plainly appears from their writings. It being then, I

(r) " For I think, that God hath set forth the apostles
 last, as it were appointed to death: for we are made a
 spectacle unto the world, and to angels, and to men.
 Even unto this present hour, we both hunger and thirst,
 and are naked, and are buffeted, and have no certain
 dwelling place; and labour, working with our own
 hands: we are made as the filth of the world, and are
 the offscouring of all things, unto this day." 1 Cor. iv.
 9. 11. 12. 13.

(f) " Ye men of Israel, why marvel ye at this? or
 why look ye so earnestly on us, as though, by our own
 power or holiness, we had made this man to walk?"
 Acts iii. 12.

think, evident, that the witnesses could not have been actuated by either of those motives, and as no others, can, with any degree of reason or probability, be alledged, it follows, that if these men were impostors, they must have become such without any motive at all.

Having, I conceive, sufficiently shewn, that the witnesses could not have had any inducement to become impostors, or to impose false miracles on the world, I shall now endeavour to shew, that they had, on the contrary, the strongest reasons which men could have, to deter them from such an attempt.

The limits I have prescribed to this work, will not permit me to go into that detail, which would be necessary, to give the reader an adequate idea of the sufferings of these men, and the complicated dangers and difficulties, which they had to encounter ; a very cursory view, however, of this matter, will, I think, be sufficient to shew, that the most weighty considerations existed, to prevent them from attempting to commit the

crime with which they are charged, in the proposition before us,

It should be recollected, that the people, among whom the apostles were commanded by their leader, to propagate the new religion, being all either Jews or Heathens, every attempt to make proselytes, was necessarily, an attempt to subvert, either the antient religion of the province, or that of the empire,^t to both of which it was considered as equally hostile. The Jews having crucified the founder of this religion in an early stage of its institution, the apostles, who may be said to have shared his sufferings, must have been well aware of the extreme difficulty and danger of the undertaking they were about to engage in, and this difficulty was increased, no less by the nature of the Jewish opinions, and idolatrous institution, which they had to oppose, than of the religion which they were

(t) The reader will recollect, that Judea, the country, in which christianity originated, was, at that time, a province of the Roman Empire.

commanded to propagate." It is not difficult to conceive what must have been the

(u) The new religion, as addressed to the Jews, was a system, adverse, not only to their habitual opinions, but to those opinions upon which their hopes, partialities, pride, and consolation, were founded. This people, with or without reason, had worked themselves into a persuasion, that some signal and greatly advantageous change was to be effected in the condition of their country, by the agency of a long-promised messenger from heaven. The rulers of the Jews, their priesthood, had been the authors of this persuasion to the common people; so that it was not merely the conjecture of theoretical divines, or the secret expectations of a few recluse devotees, but it was become the popular hope and passion, and, like all popular opinions, undoubting, and impatient of contradiction. They clung to this hope under every misfortune, and with more tenacity as their dangers or calamities increased. To find, therefore, that expectations so gratifying, were to be worse than disappointed, that they were to end in the diffusion of a mild, unambitious religion, which not only decried the long esteemed merit of ritual zeal and punctuality, and declared their ostentatious parade of religion an abomination to the Almighty, but which was to advance those whom they despised, to an equality with themselves, and that, too, in those very points of comparison in which they most valued their own distinction, could be no very pleasing discovery to a Jewish mind, nor could the messengers of such intelligence, expect to be well received, or easily credited.

Nor was the new religion likely to meet with a better reception from the heathen world. Being EXCLUSIVE, it denied, without reserve, the truth of every article of hea-

situation of persons engaged in such an undertaking:—Let us imagine to ourselves a few men, leaving their friends, families, and homes, voluntarily renouncing all worldly concerns, relinquishing their former habits of life, and confining their attention to one serious object; let us view them in the exercise of their new, and perilous avocation, and conceive what must have been the situation of men, Jews themselves, preaching to Jews, a religion which blasted their fondest hopes, which more than disappointed their proudest expectations;—a religion, which, instead of victories and triumphs, instead of exalting their nation and institution above the rest of the world, allowed

then mythology, the existence of every object of their worship. It must prevail, if it prevailed at all, by the overthrow of every statue, altar, and temple in the world. Admitting that the old religion was considered by the philosophers of that age as false, yet it being interwoven (as Mr. Gibbon informs us,) “with every circumstance of
“business or pleasure, of public or private life, with all
“the offices and amusements of society,” it will not easily be credited, that a design, which at once struck at its root, could have been carried into execution with impunity by any persons, much less by those who actually did carry it into execution. See Paley’s Evid.

them no pre-eminence whatever, but was to advance those whom they despised, to an equality with themselves:—Let us contemplate them as preachers of humility and meekness, to pride and passion; of inward purity and rectitude of intention, to outward strictness, ostentation and zeal: let us consider them as men contending with prejudice, backed by authority, and opposing, alike, the power of princes, and the influence of priests: let us follow them into prison, see them there, separately undergoing tortures the most excruciating, and finally suffering deaths the most horrible; and,

(v). Of the cruel persecutions of the primitive christians (speaking of them in a general sense, as a body of men,) we have satisfactory historical evidence, but that part of the case in which the sufferings of the apostles, in PARTICULAR, are spoken of, must, in a great measure, rest upon the testimony of the sacred historians themselves, as might, indeed, have been expected; for who, in that age, would have written a history of the lives and sufferings of the christians, but christians? If we find the persecutions of these people in the apostolic age, incidentally noticed by contemporary heathen writers, it is as much as could reasonably be expected from them;—it is in our own books we must look for the DETAIL of these transactions. It should be particularly observed, however, that the testimo-

having considered these circumstances, we shall then be able to form some idea of the magnitude of those evils which resulted, and which the apostles had every reason to expect, and it appears did expect, would result to them, from a perseverance in the undertaking.

From this view of the premises, rapid as it is, I think it will appear sufficiently evident, that, so far from having any inducement to impose upon the world respecting these miracles, the most weighty considerations existed, to deter the witnesses from such an attempt—nay more, when we consider that they might have avoided all these evils, by simply desisting from that conduct by which they were brought upon them, or, at the worst, by renouncing the religion they had embraced; we shall be obliged to confess, not only that all wordly motives were in favor of the latter conduct, but

any of the sacred writers on this subject is strongly corroborated, as well by incidental notices of this sort, which have come to our knowledge, as by evidence arising out of the nature of the case—in support of which assertions, see Paley's Evid.

that they were *such* motives as it seems scarcely possible for human nature to resist in any case, even though a sacrifice of truth had been the certain consequence of acquiescence ;—and which motives, I conceive, it would have been utterly impossible to resist, had not these men been perfectly satisfied of the reality of those things, in attestation of the truth of which, they were then suffering ; and had they not been supported by the hope of enjoying eternal happiness, as the reward of their fidelity.

I have now to shew, that the crime, of which the witnesses are accused, is, in its nature, the very reverse of their character.—These men are charged with having imposed upon the world as true, miracles which they knew to be false. Now it is contended, that falsehood and imposition, not only formed no part of, but that those vices are in direct opposition to, the characters of these men ; and, in support of this proposition, I appeal to their writings, the most striking features in which are integrity, candor, and unaffected simplicity : So strongly, indeed, are these books marked with the characters of

truth, that it appears to me almost impossible to peruse them with attention, without, at the same time, feeling conscious that you are reading a narrative of *facts*. This may be observed of the apostolic writings generally, but the following passages, among others, in which the writers relate facts apparently disadvantageous to the religion they were labouring to propagate, will alone, I think, sufficiently establish the truth of the assertion.

Acts x. 40. 41. “ Him God raised up;
 ‘ the third day, and shewed him openly ;
 ‘ not to all the people, but to witnesses cho-
 ‘ sen before of God, even to us, who did
 ‘ eat and drink with him after he rose from
 ‘ the dead.” The commonest understand-
 ing must have perceived, that the history of
 the resurrection would have come with
 more advantage, if the apostles had related
 that Jesus Christ, after he was risen, appear-
 ed to his foes as well as to his friends ; or,
 even if they had asserted the public appear-
 ance of Christ in general unqualified terms,
 without noticing, as they have done, the
 presence of his disciples upon each occasion,

and noticing it in such a manner, as to lead their readers to suppose, that none but disciples were present—in either of which ways they *could* have represented it.

Matt. xi. 2. Luke vii. 18. “Now when John had heard in the prison, the works of Christ, he sent two of his disciples, and said unto him; Art thou he that should come, or look we for another?” To confess, still more to state, that John the Baptist had his doubts concerning the character of Jesus, could not but afford a handle to cavil and objection. But truth, like honesty, neglects appearances.

John vi. 66. “From that time, many of his disciples went back, and walked no more with him.” Would any but a writer of integrity have put down this anecdote?

Or this, which Matthew has preserved, (xiii. 58.) “he did not many mighty works there; because of their unbelief.”

Where do we discern a stronger mark of candour, than in Acts xxviii. 24? where

the evangelist, after relating that Paul, upon his first arrival at Rome, preached to the Jews from morning until evening, adds, 'and some believed the things which were spoken, and some believed them not.'^(w)

Several other similar instances of candour in the sacred historians might be produced, would the limits of this work permit; but the above, I presume, will make it sufficiently evident, that whatever might have been the failings of the apostles, a want of candour and integrity, could not have been among the number;—unless, indeed, we suppose, that the same men, who, in some instances, paid so sacred a regard to truth, and *voluntarily* made such important sacrifices to it, have, in other instances, sacrificed truth itself, in the greatest degree possible, and that too, in the same book, while wri-

(w) These manifestations of the candour of the historians are, with us, of more advantage to their testimony, than a different statement, or total omission, of these circumstances would have been to the nature of the evidence. But this is an effect which the evangelists could not foresee; and I think, that it was by no means the case at the time when the books were composed.

ing on the same subject, and, (I might add), without any motive whatever !

It has now, if I mistake not, been made appear, that the case above supposed, is precisely that of the witnesses to the christian miracles ;—If, however, notwithstanding every motive to the contrary ; if, notwithstanding such strong evidence of their integrity, the apostles of Jesus Christ were impostors ;—if these men could have thus acted and suffered with a consciousness of falsehood and hollowness at the bottom— they must have been not merely *exceptions* to nature's laws, but *inversions* of them ; they must have been delighted with pain, as other men are with pleasure, and must have pursued misery as others seek happiness. Now that such should have been the case ; that these men should voluntarily sacrifice, not only all that is dear to man in life, not only life itself, but also the chance of happiness in another world, and all this for [no other purpose, than to teach men truth and honesty, by means of falsehood and deception ;—to attest the reality of miracles which they knew were never perfor-

med ;—that these men should thus act, appears to me to be far more improbable than the miracles in question, and would, in fact, be a miracle itself, more difficult to believe than any recorded in the New Testament.

The second part of this proposition yet remains to be examined, viz. That the witnesses *succeeded* in imposing on the world as true, these pretended miracles, which they knew to be false.

In examining this assertion, it will be necessary to take a view of the nature of the miracles themselves, and of the local circumstances under which they are said to have been performed ; and to consider the character and situation, as well of the men who are charged with the imposition, as of those on whom they are said to have imposed.

Of the nature and local circumstances of the miracles, I have already had occasion to speak. They were many, of various kinds, and performed under almost every possible variety of circumstance ;—not in obscurity, or in the presence of friends to the

institution only, but in open day-light, indiscriminately before enemies and friends, in some instances before few persons, and in others before multitudes;—they were not published in a country remote from the scene of action, or at a distant period of time, but were made known at the time and place, in which they are alledged to have been wrought, and, consequently, while the persons were yet living on whom they are said to have been performed. Without recapitulating what has already been stated on this subject, under the head of the first proposition, I shall here only observe, that many of the miracles are of such a nature, and were, it appears, performed under such circumstances, as, in my opinion, totally negatives the supposition, that the people of that age were imposed upon respecting their reality; which supposition appears to me yet more improbable, when I consider the character and situation of these supposed impostors;—that they were poor, plain, and illiterate men, and so far from possessing any kind of influence, that they had recourse, it appears, to bodily labour to procure a mere.

subsistence;^x—and the improbability of that supposition, appears to me yet more striking, when I consider the period of time, and place, in which these miracles, were performed;—for it should be recollected, that this religion, providentially, was not introduced in a dark or illiterate age of the world, or in an obscure part of the world, but at a period, when the literature of Greece and Rome were at their height, and in one of the first cities at that time in existence:—At a period, when the faculties of the human mind had acquired so great a degree of maturity, as to have brought to light, truths apparently undiscoverable by mere human reason. In such an age it cannot be denied, that there existed men, who were not only fully capable, but who possessed every imaginable means and opportunity, as well as disposition, to expose the (supposed) falsity of these miracles; for such was the nature of many of them, that, if they were not true, they must, I conceive, have been palpably false. If, then, it appears,

(x) See Note at the bottom of page 116.

that the most open and declared enemies of these witnesses, their own countrymen and contemporaries, have attributed to magic, or to the agency of evil spirits, the greater number of these miracles, is it not an indirect avowal of the reality of such miracles ? And will not this avowal acquire a still greater weight, if it appear that the enemies of these witnesses, were, at the same time, their natural and legitimate superiors ? And if, being able to employ all the means which power and authority can administer, to expose the falsity of that, which they presume to be an imposition, they never have succeeded ; and if, afterwards, it appear that *other* enemies of these witnesses, have also attributed to magical arts the miraculous facts they attested ; and if it appear that these enemies were as enlightened as the age, in which they lived, admitted ; that they were equally knowing, artful, vigilant and inveterate ;—if it appear that most of them existed in times not very distant from those of the witnesses ; and if, finally, it appear that one of those enemies, the most subtle and obstinate of them all, and seated, too, on

one of the most illustrious thrones in the world, has admitted several of these miraculous facts, y will not these circumstances afford the highest degree of presumptive proof, that mankind were *not* imposed upon respecting them, but, on the contrary, that these miracles are true? That they will afford such proof, cannot, I think, be denied; —to me, indeed, when added to what has

(y) The reader will meet with the most material of these concessions of Celsus, Prophecy, Julian, and the other adversaries of the evangelical witnesses, in the excellent treatises of Grotius, Ditten, Vernet, Burgur, Bullet, &c. (Bonnet's Philo. and Critical enquiries, from which the latter part of the preceeding statement is taken.)

It may perhaps be necessary to repeat, that the object of these observations is, not to exhibit a complete view of the evidences of christianity, but to lead to an examination of those evidences, by shewing, that this religion is, at least, not so palpably false, as to render an enquiry into its credibility unnecessary. It would therefore be as inconsistent with the plan, as the limits of the work, to enter into a detail of the individual testimony of which these evidences are composed, or of the particular circumstances out of which they arise. I am not conscious, however, of having advanced any thing in these observations, which cannot be supported by satisfactory evidence; for which evidence, in cases that require proof, and where no authority is given, the reader is referred to Paley's evid. christianity.

been previously stated on the subject, they appear to amount to *satisfactory* evidence that the miracles were really performed.

It has now, if I mistake not, been satisfactorily shewn, that it is alike morally impossible the witnesses should, by such means, have attempted to impose upon the world respecting these miraculous facts ; or, if they had attempted it, that they could have succeeded in so doing, and, consequently, that the proposition in question is altogether unfounded.

PROPOSITION III.

That the whole story, so far as respects these miracles, is a fabrication of some posterior age. ^z

IF the facts above supposed are true, (and true they will be found on due investigation,) one of them will completely disprove the proposition before us :—
The fact alluded to is this ; that the

(z) I do not know that this objection has ever been urged ; nevertheless, as being a case within the limits of possibility, it was thought proper to state it.

most open and declared enemies of these witnesses, their own countrymen and contemporaries, have attributed to magic, or to the agency of evil spirits, the greater number of these miracles—for if the *contemporaries* of the witnesses have admitted, or denied, or in any way noticed such miracles, it will follow, of course, that they could not be an imposition of any subsequent age; but, besides this, we have sufficient historical evidence, that the books in which these miracles are recorded (that is, the four Gospels, and the Acts of the Apostles) “are quoted or alluded to by a series of christian writers, beginning with those who were contemporary with the apostles, or who immediately succeeded them, and proceeding in close and regular succession, from their time to the present;”^a and there is the greatest reason to believe, that these books have continued the same, at least substantially so, and as to all the material facts, from the apostolic age down to this day.^b

To advance argument in support of plain facts would be superfluous, or it would not be

(a) Paley's Evid.

(b) *ibid.*

difficult to shew, from the very nature of the case, that miracles must have been performed, or at least believed to have been performed; for, unless such had been the case, our reason informs us, and the experience of the present age in cases somewhat analagous * makes it evident that such a religion, in such an age, and among such a people, could not have been propagated at all; much less by those poor and illiterate men who really did propagate it, and that too with so much rapidity, and in opposition to the interests, prejudices, power, and learning of mankind.

(c) The means which our missionaries possess of making converts to the christian religion, are, I believe, in every respect superior to those possessed by the apostles; the power of performing miracles excepted: Yet with every other advantage on their side, what slow progress do they make in the work! With what difficulty do THEY make a single proselyte,* while the APOSTLES could add thousands to the number of believers in a few days! In Europe, where there are so many Jews, how rarely can they now make a convert of one; yet of the multitudes of people whom the apostles converted, a large proportion were Jews!

* See Reports of the Missionary Societies, established for the purpose of propagating the Gospel in the East Indies, in Greenland, among the South-Sea Islanders, and the Indians on this Continent.

PROPOSITION IV.

That the miracles in question, were really performed.

THE fate of this proposition depends altogether upon that of the three preceding ones: If I have succeeded in setting those aside;—if it has been shewn (and I trust it has, supposing the premises to be admitted) that the first and second are morally impossible, and that the third is absolutely false; it follows, that there is a moral certainty of the fourth proposition being true; and if so—if the miracles be true—of the religion being true likewise. ^d

(d) It is possible our final conclusion may yet be objected to, and that by an argument to the following effect. “Your reasoning goes to prove, that the first and second propositions are moral impossibilities. They indeed appear to be such; but you cannot deny that the miracles themselves, being physical impossibilities, are liable to rejection on a similar ground. Admitting, therefore, that you have succeeded in setting the first and second propositions aside it only amounts to this—that it is morally impossible the testimony can have been false, and physically impossible the miracles could be true.” To this it is answered—we do not admit these miracles to have been physical impossibilities; they might have been the result of a physical predetermination in which case they would not be a violation of physical order, but they would be particular dispensations of that order. Supreme intelligence beheld at

*Summary of the Evidence, conclusions deduced
from the preceding arguments, &c.*

WE have now taken a cursory view of the principal evidences of christianity. We have separately considered its prophecy, its miracles, and its internal evidence, and have seen, I think, that from each of those heads, may be drawn the most weighty arguments in support of the divine origin of this institution. If, then, such is the result of an

once the whole series of things, and miracles entered from eternity into that series, as a condition of the greatest good. If it be admitted that there is a God—that this world had a Creator, it cannot be denied that such MIGHT at least, have been the case; nor can it be denied that, if nature has received laws, he who has imposed those laws, has the power of suspending, modifying, or directing them as he pleases. We are not, therefore, possessed of sufficient data upon which to pronounce, that miracles are physical impossibilities. But even allowing the above statement of the case to be correct, viz. “that it is morally impossible the testimony can have been false, and physically impossible the miracles could be true;—as these opposite (supposed) impossibilities, cannot both of them have been really impossible—as either the miracles must have been true, or the testimony false, the question then comes to this—on which side is the probability, or the least improbability? Now it appears to me, that this question can be decided without difficulty, for it having, I trust, been shown that the witnesses had no inducement to give false

examination of those evidences in a detached point of view, what an addition of weight does each of them receive when considered in connection with the others? when, like individual members of a well ordered community, we behold them mutually supporting, and supported by each other? Suppose we take a momentary view of the subject in this light, and endeavour, in few words, to trace this connection? *

From the state of mankind previous to the introduction of christianity, the importance of a revelation to the improvement and happiness of our species, is obvious. A revelation, then, being manifestly wanted, we find that a certain person, in the character of a witness, it follows, that, if they did give such testimony, they became impostors without any motive whatever, which is to suppose an effect without a cause; but in supposing the miracles to have been true, we assign an adequate cause or motive for the extraordinary exertion of omnipotent power in the performance of them, viz.—to convince mankind of the truth of a revelation, manifestly wanted, and of inestimable value; and which effect could not have been produced by any other means, at least that we are acquainted with, than that of miracles.

(c) In the following series, some few facts, not before noticed, are introduced from the evangelical history; not as being of essential importance in themselves, but because they were necessary to shew the connection of the evidences.

ter of a prophet, living in an age some centuries prior to the christian æra, predicted that a revelation to mankind would be made; that he described the character of the person by whom it was to be published; declared the object of his mission to be the salvation of mankind; pointed out the means by which such object would be accomplished, viz. the death of that person by whom the intelligence was to be made known; predicted that miracles of a particular description would be performed; and, with the precision of an historian, detailed the treatment which the messenger of these glad tidings would experience. It further appears, that about seven centuries after the delivery of this prophecy, at Jerusalem, the capital of Judea, a revelation was accordingly declared: That this revelation, its object, the character by whom, and the means by which, that object was effected, and the treatment which that character experienced, was precisely such as had been thus predicted. It appears further

(f) Isaiah, xxxv. 5. 6. "Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf shall be unstopped. Then shall the lame man leap as an hart, and the tongue of the dumb shall sing."

that as a part of the means by which such object was to be accomplished, and conformably to what had been predicted, this person (who called himself Jesus Christ,) preached a religion altogether unlike, and infinitely superior to, every thing that had ever before been heard of; and that the novelty and perfection of this religion is such, as proves the utter impossibility of its having been invented or discovered by any mere human being whatever. We find also, that this person made choice of twelve poor and illiterate men (whom he called his disciples,) to propagate his religion after his death, which he predicted would shortly happen by the hands of his enemies: That miracles of various kinds were performed by Jesus Christ in support of this religion, and in attestation of his divine authority; which miracles, it appears, corresponded both with the prediction, and the spirit of that benign religion they were intended to establish: That Jesus Christ, a short time previous to his departure out of the world, commanded his disciples to propagate his religion throughout all nations, for which purpose he promised

that they should “ be endued with power
‘ from on high. ^h”

Accordingly we find that, soon afterwards, his disciples being assembled at a public festival, a miracle was wrought upon them, the effect of which was, that they were enabled to speak various languages, with which, until that time, they were wholly unacquainted : That shortly after this event they began to execute the command of their crucified master, by preaching his religion, and forming societies of christians in foreign countries, and among nations who spoke different languages ; to the success of which undertakings, the power of speech, which they had thus miraculously received, was of the utmost importance. It further appears that, in attestation of the truth of the doctrines they delivered, the disciples performed various miracles in the name of Jesus Christ, of a nature perfectly consonant to the benevolent spirit of his religion : That, contrary to the dispositions of human nature, in opposition to the prejudices and pleasures, the interests, power, and learning of mankind, and notwithstanding the ignorance and in-

significance of the persons by whom it was preached, the religion rapidly gained ground, and, finally, about the year three hundred and thirteen, the Roman empire, under Constantine, became christian. And lastly it appears, that, without supernatural assistance, and unless miracles had been performed in its support, it is morally impossible the religion could have been thus propagated.

Such then is a connected view of the facts which our arguments go to prove ; and if they are proved—if the conclusion deduced from the preceding examination of the internal evidence of christianity, or of the christian miracles, be correct—if *either* of those conclusions are established, it inevitably follows that *supernatural means have been employed in the discovery and propagation of the Christian Religion* ; or, in other words, that it has derived its origin from God.

Among many other arguments which might be advanced in support of christianity, and corroborative of the facts recorded in the holy scriptures, our own personal observation furnishes us with one of no inconsiderable weight. The effects, moral and poli-

tical, which have resulted from the introduction of this religion, are evident at this very day, and will continue evident so long as prophane history is extant ; among which effects may be classed, most of the comforts and endearments of social and civilized life that mankind now enjoy.

By the evangelical history we are informed, that the sacrament of Baptism by water, and the sacrament called the Lord's Supper, were instituted by Jesus Christ ; and that the latter of these, in remembrance of him, he solemnly commanded his disciples to continue. Accordingly we perceive that it is continued ; that these sacraments are observed by christians at this very day, and we find, or may find, that they have been so continued from the apostolic age down to this time : the existence of which sacraments is not only conclusive evidence in support of those portions of holy writ in which their institution is recorded, but is, in a degree corroborative of the whole evangelical history ; for if we find that demonstrative evidence does now exist of those facts, therein recorded, the proof of which (by reason of the

nature of those facts) ought to continue permanent and their truth demonstrable, it is fair and reasonable to infer from thence that those *other* facts, attested by the same witnesses, the truth of which (for the same reason) cannot now, perhaps, be so completely demonstrated, are nevertheless equally true; because that inference (in the case of the christian miracles particularly) is not only unopposed by the least shadow of evidence, on the one hand, but is supported, on the other, by every proof of which such facts are, in their nature, capable; and which, if not strictly demonstrative, amounts to, at least, the strongest presumptive evidence of their reality.

Not to insist, here, on the divine origin of christianity as deducible from its *internal* evidence—that this religion was propagated with great rapidity, and under circumstances the most unfavorable to its propagation, and that an astonishing change in the state of the world has been the consequence of its introduction, are facts too evident to be denied. For the existence of these facts, no adequate cause can

be assigned, except the interference of a supernatural power : If, therefore, there is any relation between cause and effect ; if a revolution in the opinions and affairs of mankind, the most wonderful which history has recorded, was not produced without any cause, or by a cause obviously inadequate to its production, then are we intitled to conclude that the scriptural account of the matter is true. If, however, notwithstanding all that has been said, the reader should still be unable to discover a supernatural agency in these transactions, in the production of any of these events, let him look around, and mark the prophecies fulfilling in the world at this very time ; in particular let him take his bible, and examine the predictions therein recorded, concerning the Jewish nation ; let him compare such predictions with the state of these wonderful people, from that time to the present, and if he does not acknowledge the fulfillment of those prophecies to be a standing miracle, he must deny the evidence of his senses. Even the present state of the christian world, the boasted progress of infidelity, furnishes

an argument in support of revelation ; for we find this state of things clearly predicted ; it is nothing more than what that revelation teaches us to expect.ⁱ

It is observable, in inquiries of this nature, how prone the mind of man is to pass lightly over the most weighty evidences of the truth of revelation, while it seizes with avidity, the least shadow of objection, and magnifies every little [difficulty, into an irrefragable proof of its falsehood. I have said

(i) (2 Peter iii. 3.) "Knowing this first, that there shall come in the last days, scoffers, walking after their own lusts. (ii. 2.) And many shall follow their pernicious ways, by reason of whom the way of truth shall be evil spoken of. (10.) But chiefly them that walk after the flesh in the lust of uncleanness, and despise government. Presumptuous are they, self-willed ; they are not afraid to speak evil of dignities." (12.) These "speak evil of the things that they understand not ; and shall utterly perish in their own corruption. (13.) Spots they are and blemishes, sporting themselves with their own deceivings. (14.) having eyes full of adultery, and that cannot cease from sin ; beguiling unstable souls : (12.) For when they speak great swelling words of vanity, they allure through the lusts of the flesh, through much wantonness, those that were clean escaped from them who live in error ; while they promise them liberty, they themselves are the servants of corruption."

that the *mind* of man is thus prone, but perhaps this should be attributed, not so much to an error in the judgment, as to a corruption of the heart.

On the subject of revelation, the proper object of inquiry appears to be mistaken. The faculties of the human mind being confessedly very limited, the only province of reason is to inquire into the *authority* of that revelation; and when once *that* is proved, she has no more to do, but to acquiesce in its doctrines, on the fitness and propriety of which she is by no means competent to decide. Various objections to the truth of this revelation are urged, most of which have been satisfactorily answered already, and not a few of the number are levelled against what is not christianity, but mere human system. Some difficulties, it must be confessed, still remain, and it would be a miracle greater than any we are required to believe, if there remained none; if a being with but five scanty inlets of knowledge, who cannot account for the motion of a finger, or the vegetation of a blade of grass, could fully comprehend the dispensations of

omnipotence, and fathom the depths of the wisdom and knowledge of *Him which is, which was, and which is to come ! k* .

It is a disadvantage to the christian revelation, that plausible objections to its truth may be stated in few words, which objections, from the nature of the case, require an answer at considerable length ; and hence it often happens that the former is remembered, when the latter is forgot. To this facility of objecting may be principally attributed, the many humble retailers of infidelity, whom we find always ready with a string of trite objections to that revelation, which, perhaps, a vicious course of life

(k) Walking the other day in St. PAUL's, (London,) " I beheld a fly upon one of the pillars ; and it straightway came into my head, that this same fly was a FREE-THINKER. For it required some comprehension in the eye of the spectator, to take in at one view the various parts of the building, in order to observe their symmetry and design. But to the fly, whose prospect was confined to a little part of one of the stones of a single pillar, the joint beauty of the whole, or the distinct use of its parts, were inconspicuous, and nothing could appear but small inequalities in the surface of the hewn stone, which, in the view of that insect, seemed so many deformed rocks and precipices." Addison.

Inclines them to wish may be false, or an idle one prevents their finding true. But to prevent the ill effects which might result from the above circumstance, we should do well to follow the advice of a writer, no less celebrated for his talents, than admired for his virtues.¹ He says, "when by reading or discourse, we find ourselves thoroughly convinced of the truth of any article, and of the reasonableness of our belief in it, we should never after suffer ourselves to call it into question. We may perhaps forget the arguments which occasioned our conviction, but we ought to remember the strength they had with us, and therefore still to retain the conviction which they once produced. This is no more than what we do in every common art or science, nor is it possible to act otherwise, considering the weakness and limitation of our intellectual faculties. It was thus that *Latimer*, one of the glorious army of martyrs who introduced the reformation in *England*, behaved himself in that great conference which

(1) Addition.

was managed between the most learned among the Protestants and Papists in the reign of Queen *Mary*. This venerable old man knowing how his abilities were impaired by age, and that it was impossible for him to recollect all those reasons which had directed him in the choice of his religion, left his companions, who were in the full possession of their parts and learning, to baffle and confound their antagonists by the force of reason. As for himself he only repeated to his adversaries the articles in which he firmly believed, and in the profession of which he was determined to die. It is in this manner that the mathematician proceeds upon propositions which he has once demonstrated ; and though the demonstration may have slipped out of his memory, he builds upon the truth, because he knows it was demonstrated. This rule is absolutely necessary for weaker minds, and in some measure for men of the greatest abilities."

I am aware it may be objected, that infidelity is not confined to men of the above class—that Bolingbroke, Voltaire, Helvetius, Hume, and others of considerable lite-

rary fame, were unbelievers; but on the other hand, let it be recollected, “that Bacon, Boyle, Newton, Grotius, Locke, Euler—that Addison, Hartley, Haller, West, Jenyns—that lords Nottingham, King, Barrington, Lyttleton, with an hundred other laymen, who were surely as eminent for their literary attainments in every kind of science, as either Bolingbroke or Voltaire, were professed *believers* of christianity.”

It is by no means consistent with the plan of these observations, to enter into an examination of the arguments against revelation, by which the deistical writers endeavour to justify their infidelity; nor indeed does it appear to me to be very necessary, for if the divine origin of the christian religion is here demonstrated by arguments which cannot be confuted, no others, however plausible or numerous, which either have been, or can be advanced, founded on probabilities, doubts and conjectures, can ever disprove it, because if it is once shewn to be true, it cannot be false; it may not, however, be improper, here, to say a few words on the tendency of sceptical principles, on the

resulting consequences of infidelity ;—consequences, which alone are a sufficient answer to all that can be urged in its defence. m

“ I. The sceptical or irreligious system subverts the whole foundation of morals. It may be assumed as a maxim, that no person can be required to act contrary to his greatest good, or his highest interest, comprehensively viewed in relation to the whole duration of his being. It is often our duty to forego our own interest *partially* ; to sacrifice a smaller pleasure for the sake of a greater ; to incur a present evil in pursuit of a distant good of more consequence : In a word, to arbitrate, among interfering claims

(m). It is difficult to know what the principles of modern sceptics on these subjects really are. In argument they seem to take any ground which happens to suit their present purpose, so that it may reasonably be doubted whether the generality of them have any fixed principles at all : The only point on which their minds appear to be made up, is to reject revelation at all events. Such loose principles, or rather the non-existence of any principles, are not, perhaps, materially different in their consequences from those produced by atheism itself. To the conscientious and moral deist, however, who believes man to be an accountable agent, the following observations will not generally apply.

of inclination, is the moral arithmetic of human life. But to risk the happiness of the whole duration of our being in any case whatever, admitting it to be possible, would be foolish, because the sacrifice must, by the nature of it, be so great as to preclude the possibility of compensation.

“ As the present world, upon sceptical principles, is the only place of recompence, whenever the practice of virtue fails to promise the greatest sum of present good, cases which often occur in reality, and much oftener in appearance, every motive to virtuous conduct is superseded, a deviation from rectitude becomes the part of wisdom ; and should the path of virtue, in addition to this, be obstructed by disgrace, torment, or death, to persevere would be madness and folly, and a violation of the first and most essential law of nature, Virtue on these principles, being in numberless instances, at war with self-preservation, never can or ought to become a fixed habit of the mind.

“ The system of Infidelity is not only incapable of arming virtue for great and trying occasions ; but leaves it unsupported in

the most ordinary occurrences. In vain will its advocates appeal to a moral sense, to benevolence and sympathy ; in vain will they expatiate on the tranquillity and pleasure attendant on a virtuous course ; for it is undeniable that these impulses may be overcome, and though you may remind the offender, that in disregarding them he has violated his nature, and that a conduct consistent with them is productive of much internal satisfaction ; yet, if he reply that his taste is of a different sort, that there are other gratifications which he values more, and that every man must choose his own pleasures, the argument is at an end.

“ Rewards and punishments awarded by omnipotent power, afford a palpable and pressing motive, which can never be neglected without renouncing the character of a rational creature ; but tastes and relishes are not to be prescribed.

“ A motive in which the reason of man shall acquiesce, enforcing the practice of virtue, at all times and seasons, enters into the very essence of moral obligation ; modern infidelity supplies no such motive ; it is,

therefore, essentially and infallibly a system of enervation, turpitude and vice,

“ This chasm in the construction of morals, can only supplied by the firm belief of a rewarding and avenging Deity, who binds duty and happiness, though they may seem distant, in an indissoluble chain, without which, whatever usurps the name of virtue, is not a principle, but a feeling ; not a determinate rule, but a fluctuating expedient, varying with the tastes of individuals, and changing with the scenes of life.

“ Nor is this the only way in which infidelity subverts the foundation of morals. All reasoning on the morals, pre-supposes a distinction betwixt inclinations and duties, affections and rules: the former prompt, the latter prescribe ; the former supply motives to action, the latter regulate and control it. Hence, it is evident, if virtue has any just claim to authority, it must be under the latter of these notions, that is, under the character of a law. It is under this notion, *in fact*, that its dominion has ever been acknowledged to be paramount and supreme.

“ But without the intervention of a superior will, it is impossible there should be any moral laws, except in the lax, metaphorical sense, in which we speak of the laws of matter and motion: men being essentially equal, morality is, on these principles, only a stipulation or silent compact, into which every individual is supposed to enter, as far as suits his convenience, and for the breach of which he is accountable to nothing but his own mind. His own mind is his law, his tribunal, and his judge.

“ Two consequences, the most disastrous to society, will inevitably follow the general prevalence of this system; the frequent perpetration of great crimes, and the total absence of great virtues.

“ 1. In those conjunctures which tempt avarice or inflame ambition, when a crime flatters with the prospect of impunity and the certainty of immense advantage, what is to restrain an infidel from its commission? To say that remorse will deter him, is absurd; for remorse, as distinguished from pity, is the sole offspring of religious belief,

the extinction of which is the great purpose of the infidel philosophy.

“ The dread of punishment or infamy from his fellow creatures, will be an equally ineffectual barrier, because crimes are only committed under such circumstances as suggest the hope of concealment; not to say that crimes themselves will soon lose their infamy and their horror, under the influence of that system which destroys the sanctity of virtue, by converting it into a low calculation of worldly interest. Here the sense of an ever-present Ruler, and of an avenging Judge, is of the most awful and indispensable necessity, as it is that alone which impresses on all crimes the character of folly, shews that duty and interest in every instance coincide, and that the most prosperous career of vice, the most brilliant successes of criminality, are but an *accumulation of wrath against the day of wrath*.

“ As the frequent perpetration of great crimes is an inevitable consequence of the diffusion of sceptical principles, so to understand this consequence in its full extent, we

must look beyond their immediate effects, and consider the disruption of social ties, the destruction of confidence, the terror, suspicion, and hatred, which must prevail in that state of society in which barbarous deeds are familiar. The tranquillity which pervades a well-ordered community, and the mutual good offices which bind its members together, is founded on an implied confidence in the indisposition to annoy, in the justice, humanity, and moderation of those among whom we dwell ; so that the worst consequence of crimes is, that they impair the stock of public charity and general tenderness. The dread and hatred of our species would infallibly be grafted on a conviction, that we were exposed, every moment, to the furies of an unbridled ferocity, and that nothing but the power of the magistrate stood between us and the daggers of assassins. In such a state, laws deriving no support from public manners, are unequal to the task of curbing the fury of the passions, which, from being concentrated into selfishness, fear, and revenge, acquire new force ; terror and suspicion beget cru-

erty, and inflict injuries by way of prevention; pity is extinguished in the stronger impulse of self-preservation; the tender and generous affections are crushed, and nothing is seen but the retaliation of wrongs, the fierce and unmitigated struggle for superiority. This is but a faint sketch of the incalculable calamities and horrors we must expect, should we be so unfortunate as ever to witness the triumph of modern infidelity.

“ 2. This system is as foil as barren of great and sublime virtues, as it is prolific in crimes. By great and sublime virtues are meant, those which are called into action on great and trying occasions, which demand the sacrifice of the dearest interests and prospects of human life, and sometimes of life itself; the virtues, in a word, which by their rarity and splendour, draw admiration, and have rendered illustrious the character of patriots, martyrs, and confessors. It requires but little reflection to perceive, that whatever veils a future world, and contracts the limits of existence within the present life, must tend, in a proportionable degree, to

diminish the grandeur, and narrow the sphere of human agency.

“As well might you expect exalted sentiments of justice from a professed gamester, as look for noble principles in the man whose hopes and fears are all suspended on the present moment, and who stakes the whole happiness of his being on the events of this vain and fleeting life. If he is ever impelled to the performance of great achievements in a good cause, it must be solely by the hope of fame; a motive, which, besides that it makes virtue the servant of opinion, usually grows weaker at the approach of death, and which, however it may surmount the love of existence, in the heat of battle, or in the moment of public observation, can seldom be expected to operate with much force on the retired duties of a private station.

“In affirming that infidelity is unfavorable to the higher class of virtues, we are supported as well by facts as by reasoning. We should be sorry to load our adversaries with unmerited reproach; but to what history, to what record, will they appeal, for the traits of moral greatness, exhibited by their disci-

ples? Where shall we look for the trophies of infidel magnanimity, or atheistical virtue? Not that we mean to accuse them of inactivity: they have recently filled the world with the fame of their exploits; exploits of a different kind indeed, but of imperishable memory and disastrous lustre.

“ Though it is confessed, great and splendid actions are not the ordinary employment of life, but must from their nature, be reserved for high and eminent occasions, yet that system is essentially defective, which leaves no room for their cultivation. They are important, both from their immediate advantage and their remoter influence. They often save, and always illustrate, the age and nation in which they appear. They raise the standard of morals; they arrest the progress of degeneracy; they diffuse a lustre over the path of life: monuments of the greatness of the human soul, they present to the world the august image of virtue in her sublimest form, from which streams of light and glory issue to remote times and ages; while their commemoration, by the

pen of historians and poets, awakens in distant bosoms the sparks of kindred excellence.

“ Combine the frequent and familiar perpetration of atrocious deeds, with the dearth of great and generous actions, and you have the exact picture of that condition of society, which completes the degradation of the species ; the frightful contrast of dwarfish virtues and gigantic vices, where every thing good is mean and little, and every thing evil is rank and luxuriant; a dead and sickening uniformity prevails, broken only at intervals by volcanic eruptions of anarchy and crime.

—“ II. Hitherto we have considered the influence of scepticism on the principles of virtue ; and have endeavoured to shew that it despoils it of its dignity, and lays its authority in the dust : its influence on the formation of character, remains to be examined. The actions of men are oftener determined by their character than their interest : their conduct takes its colour more from their acquired taste, inclinations and habits, than from a deliberate regard to their greatest

good. It is only on great occasions the mind awakes to take an extended survey of her whole course, and that she suffers the dictates of reason to impress a new bias upon her movements; the actions of each day are, for the most part, links which follow each other in the chain of custom. Hence the great effort of practical wisdom is to imbue the mind with right tastes, affections and habits; the elements of character, and masters of action.

“ The exclusion of a Supreme Being, and of a superintending providence, tends directly to the destruction of moral taste. It robs the universe of all finished and consummate excellence, even in idea. The admiration of perfect wisdom and goodness, for which we are formed, and which kindles such unspeakable rapture in the soul, finding in the regions of scepticism nothing to which it corresponds, droops and languishes. In a world which presents a fair spectacle of order and beauty, of a vast family nourished and supported by an Almighty parent, in a world which leads the devout mind, step by step, to the contemplation of the first fair

and the first good, the sceptic is encompassed with nothing but obscurity, meanness, and disorder.

“ When we reflect on the manner in which the idea of Deity is formed, we must be convinced that such an idea, intimately present to the mind, must have a most powerful effect in refining the moral taste. Composed of the richest elements, it embraces, in the character of a beneficent parent, and Almighty ruler, whatever is venerable in wisdom, whatever is awful in authority, whatever is touching in goodness.

“ Human excellence is blended with many imperfections, and seen under many limitations ; it is beheld only in detached and separate portions, nor ever appears in any one character whole and entire : so that, when, in imitation of the stoics, we wish to form out of these fragments, the notion of a perfectly wise and good man, we know it is a mere fiction of the mind, without any real being in whom it is embodied and realized. In the belief of a Deity these conceptions are reduced to reality : the scattered rays of an ideal excellence are concentra-

ted, and become the real attributes of that Being with whom we stand in the nearest relation, who sits Supreme at the head of the universe, is armed with infinite power, and pervades all nature with his presence.

“ The efficacy of these sentiments, in producing and augmenting a virtuous taste, will indeed be proportioned to the vividness with which they are formed, and the frequency with which they recur ; yet some benefit will not fail to result from them even in their lowest degree.

“ As the object of worship will always be, in a degree, the object of imitation, hence arises a fixed standard of moral excellence, by the contemplation of which, the tendencies to corruption are counteracted, the contagion of bad example is checked, and human nature rises above its natural level.

“ When the knowledge of God was lost in the world, just ideas of virtue and moral obligation disappeared along with it. How is it to be otherwise accounted for, that in the polished nations, and in the enlightened times of Pagan antiquity, the most unnatural lusts and detestable impurities were not

only tolerated in private life, but entered into religion, and formed a material part of public worship; while among the Jews, a people so much inferior in every other branch of knowledge, the same vices were regarded with horror?

“The reason is this—the true character of God was unknown to the former, which, by the light of divine revelation, was imparted to the latter. The former cast their deities in the mould of their own imaginations, in consequence of which they partook of the vices and defects of their worshippers: to the latter, no scope was left for the wanderings of fancy, but a pure and perfect model was prescribed.

“Revelation, by displaying the true character of God, affords a pure and perfect standard of virtue; but the fashionable scepticism of the present day, affords no standard at all. Human nature knows nothing better or higher than itself. All above and around it being shrouded in darkness, and the prospect confined to the tame realities of life, virtue has no room upwards to expand, nor are any excursions permitted.

into that unseen world, the true element of the great and good, by which it is fortified with motives equally calculated to satisfy the reason, to delight the fancy, and to impress the heart.

“ Modern infidelity not only tends to corrupt the moral taste ; it also promotes the growth of those vices which are the most hostile to social happiness.” This has been abundantly shewn by the author we are now quoting, but the following considerations will alone, perhaps, be sufficient to shew the inhuman and ferocious tendency of that system.

“ The supposition that man is a moral and accountable being, destined to survive the stroke of death, and to live in a future world in a never ending state of happiness or misery, makes him a creature of incomparably more *consequence*, than the opposite supposition. When we consider him as placed here by an Almighty Ruler, in a state of probation, and that the present life is his period of trial, the first link in a vast and interminable chain which stretches into eternity, he assumes a dignified character in

our eyes. Every thing which relates to him becomes interesting ; and to trifle with his happiness is felt to be the most unpardonable levity. If such be the destination of man, it is evident, that, in the qualities which fit him for it, his principal dignity consists : his moral greatness is his true greatness. Let the sceptical principles be admitted, which represent him, on the contrary, as the offspring of chance, connected with no superior power, and sinking into annihilation at death, and he is a contemptible creature, whose existence and happiness are insignificant. The characteristic difference is lost betwixt him and the brute creation, from which he is no longer distinguished, except by the vividness and multiplicity of his perceptions.

“ If we reflect on that part of our nature which disposes us to humanity, we shall find that, where we have no particular attachment, our sympathy with the sufferings, and concern for the destruction of sensitive beings, is in proportion to their supposed importance in the general scale ; or, in other words, to their supposed capacity of

enjoyment. We feel, for example, much more at witnessing the destruction of a man than of an inferior animal, because we consider it as involving the extinction of a much greater sum of happiness. For the same reason, he who would shudder at the slaughter of a large animal, will see a thousand insects perish without a pang. Our sympathy with the calamities of our fellow-creatures is adjusted to the same proportions : for we feel more powerfully affected with the distresses of fallen greatness, than with equal or greater distresses sustained by persons of inferior rank ; because, having been accustomed to associate with an elevated station the idea of superior happiness, the loss appears the greater, and the wreck more extensive. But the disproportion in importance, betwixt man and the meanest insect, is not so great, as that which subsists betwixt man considered as *mortal* and as *immortal* ; that is, betwixt man as he is represented by the system of scepticism and that of divine revelation : for the enjoyment of the meanest insect bears some proportion, though a very small one, to the present hap-

piness of man ; but the happiness of time bears none at all to that of eternity. The sceptical system, therefore, sinks the importance of human existence to an inconceivable degree.

“ From these principles results the following important inference, that, to extinguish human life by the hand of violence, must be quite a different thing in the eyes of a sceptic, from what it is in those of a christian. With the sceptic, it is nothing more than diverting the course of a little red fluid called blood ; it is merely lessening the number by one, of many millions of fugitive, contemptible creatures : the christian sees, in the same event, an accountable being cut off from a state of probation, and hurried, perhaps unprepared, into the presence of his Judge, to hear that final, that irrevocable sentence, which is to fix him forever in an unalterable condition of felicity or woe. The former perceives in death nothing but its physical circumstances ; the latter is impressed with the magnitude of its moral consequences. It is the moral relation which man is supposed to bear to a superior power,

the awful idea of accountability, the influence which his present dispositions and actions are conceived to have upon his eternal destiny, more than any superiority of intellectual powers, abstracted from these considerations, which invest him with such mysterious grandeur, and constitute the firmest guard on the sanctuary of human life. This reasoning, it is true, serves more *immediately* to shew how the disbelief of a future state endangers the security of life; but though this be its *direct* consequence, it extends by analogy much farther: since he, who has learned to sport with the *lives* of his fellow-creatures, will feel but little solicitude for their welfare in any other instance; but, as the greater includes the less, will easily pass from this to all the inferior gradations of barbarity.

“ As the advantage of the armed over the unarmed is not seen till the moment of attack, so in that tranquil state of society, in which law and order maintain their ascendancy, it is not perceived, perhaps not even suspected, to what an alarming degree the principles of modern infidelity leave us

naked and defenceless. But, let the state be convulsed, let the mounds of regular authority be once overflowed, and the still small voice of law, drowned in the tempest of popular fury (events which recent experience shews to be possible) it will then be seen that atheism is a school of ferocity; and that having taught its disciples to consider mankind as little better than a nest of insects, they will be prepared, in the fierce conflicts of party, to trample upon them without pity, and extinguish them without remorse.

“ Religion being primarily intended to make men *wise unto salvation*, the support it ministers to social order, the stability it confers on government and laws, is a *subordinate* species of advantage which we should have continued to enjoy without reflecting on its cause, but for the developement of deistical principles, and the experiment which has been made of their effects in a European country. It had been the constant boast of infidels, that their system, more liberal and generous than christianity, needed but to be tried to produce an immense accession of

human happiness; and christian nations, careless and supine, retaining little of religion but the profession, and disgusted with its restraints, lent a favourable ear to these pretensions. God permitted the trial to be made : In one country, and that the centre of christendom, revelation underwent a total eclipse, while atheism, performing on a darkened theatre its strange and fearful tragedy, confounded the first elements of society, blended every age, rank and sex, in indiscriminate proscription and massacre, and convulsed all Europe to its centre ; ^m that the imperishable memorial of these events might teach the last generations of mankind, to consider religion as the very foundation of social order, which alone has power to curb

(m) If a doubt should arise whether the enormities which have accompanied the French revolution, are justly chargeable to the then prevalence of atheism in France, let it be recollected that the men, who, by their activity and talents, prepared the minds of the people for that great change, VOLTAIRE, D'ALEMBERT, DIDEROT, ROSSEAU, and others, were avowed enemies of revelation; that, in all their writings, the diffusion of scepticism and of revolutionary principles went hand in hand ; that the fury of the most sanguinary parties was especially poin-

the fury of the passions, and secure to every one his rights."ⁿ

Such, then, is the tendency of sceptical principles; such is a sketch of some of the consequences which that system is calculated to produce. As Prometheus, by opening the box of Pandora, is said to have let loose every mischief on the world, and to have filled it with diseases and calamities; so modern infidelity, by removing the restraints of religion from the human heart, has given

“against the christian priesthood and religious institutions, without once pretending, like other persecutors, to execute the vengeance of God (whose name they never mentioned) upon his enemies; that their atrocities were committed with a wanton levity and brutal merriment; that the reign of atheism was avowedly and expressly the reign of terror; that in the full madness of their career, in the highest climax of their horrors, they shut up the temples of God, abolished his worship, and proclaimed death to be an eternal sleep. It is also worthy of remark that as these atrocities and the sceptical system mutually progressed with each other, so are they disappearing together. The late series of anarchy and crimes is now reprobated; its parent atheism, discountenanced; and its enemy, religion, invited to return.

(n) For the preceding observations on Modern Infidelity, see Hall's Sermon on that subject—a work which these extracts, it is presumed, will sufficiently recommend.

the reins to every baneful propensity of our nature, paved the way for the commission of every crime, and, unlike the fable, left us without even *hope* for a consolation.

But why, we might ask the patrons of infidelity, with such persevering industry and malignant zeal, attempt the subversion of christianity? Is it that they have discovered a better system; a more excellent rule of life, or a more consolatory hope in death, than that which the scriptures suggest? Is christianity in any respect inimical to their happiness as rational beings? Is it not a religion in which millions of our forefathers have found a refuge in every trouble, and consolation in the hour of death? A religion which has humanized our species, and given birth to those amiable virtues from which flow our most endeared pleasures, our most valuable delights? Is it not the pillar of society, the basis of morality, the friend of virtue, and the comforter of the afflicted? And have not the brightest, the most learned, and the most virtuous of mankind, been proud to enroll themselves among the

number of its disciples? Yet such is the religion which these philanthropists, these exclusive friends to mankind, would persuade us to abandon; to shut our eyes upon its evidences, and deny the clearest convictions of our reason, as well as the experience of our senses, and for what? To make room for the sublime idea of annihilation—for the glorious privilege of dying like brutes!—or, at least, to involve in doubt and obscurity, those points respecting which our nature requires the fullest assurance, and our happiness most essentially depends!

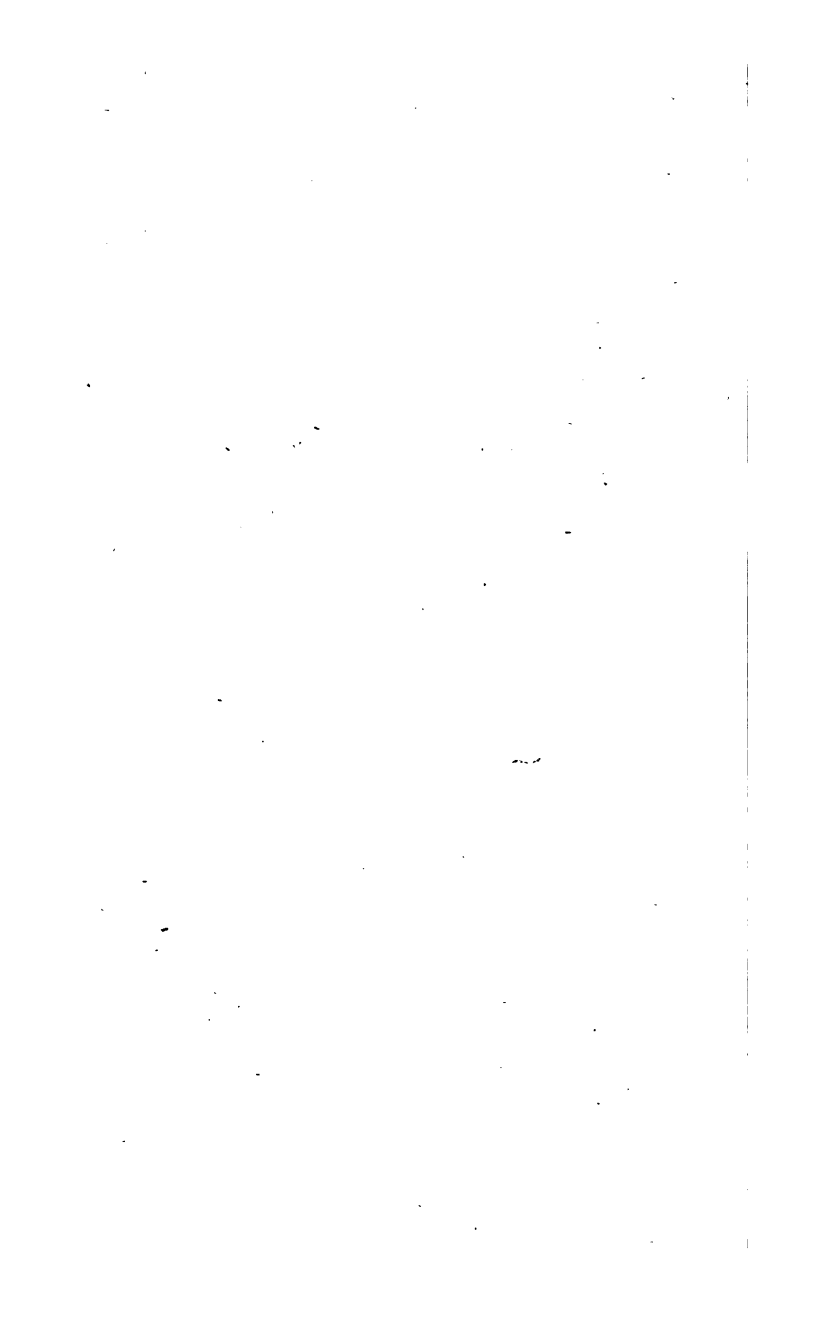
That men of good understandings, eagerly engaged in worldly pursuits, who have never examined into the grounds of christianity, should consider it as an antiquated fable, originating in fraud, confirmed by superstition, and believed by credulity, is perfectly natural.° They are not only in-

(°) “The natural man receiveth not the things of the spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him; neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned.” 1 Cor. ii. 14.

competent, for want of such examination, to decide on the authority of this religion by the deductions of reason; but their habits of life have totally disqualified them for judging of the religion itself, as it affects the happiness of the individual;—of its efficacy in speaking peace to the mind;—of its powerful influence on the heart. To such persons christianity can scarcely appear in any other light than a mixture of fiction and absurdity; but then they should remember “that in all sciences, even in mathematics themselves, there are many propositions, which on a cursory view appear to the most acute understandings, uninstructed in that science, to be impossible to be true, which yet on a closer examination are found to be truths capable of the strictest demonstration; and that therefore, in disquisitions on which we cannot determine without much learned investigation, reason uninformed is by no means to be depended on; and from hence they ought surely to conclude, that it may be at least as possible for them to be mistaken in disbelieving this revelation, who know nothing of the matter, as for those great masters of reason and erudition, Gro-

tious, Bacon, Newton, Boyle, Locke, Addison, and Lyttelton, to be deceived in their belief : a belief, to which they firmly adhered after the most diligent and learned researches into the authenticity of its records, the completion of the prophecies, the sublimity of its doctrines, the purity of its precepts, and the arguments of its adversaries ; a belief, which they have testified to the world by their writings, without any other motive, than their regard for truth and the benefit of mankind." For myself, I declare, that if any man can produce a religion which can reasonably pretend to an equal or greater confirmation than the gospel : A religion or system which is calculated to make men wiser and better, more temperate and more chaste, more meek and more patient, more kind and more just—in a word, which is better calculated to promote the happiness of mankind (considering their existence in a comprehensive sense,) than christianity;—If any man can produce such a religion or system, I, for one, will throw up my Bible and become a convert to it.

THE
GREAT IMPORTANCE
OF A
RELIGIOUS LIFE
CONSIDERED.



A SHORT CHARACTER

OF THE

AUTHOR

OF THE FOLLOWING

TREATISE.

IT may add weight, perhaps, to the reflections contained in the following pages, to inform the reader, that the author's life was one uniform exemplar of those precepts, which, with so generous a zeal, and such an elegant and affecting simplicity of style, he endeavours to recommend to general practice. He left others to contend for modes of faith, and inflame themselves and the world with endless controversy : It was the wiser purpose of his more ennobled aim, to act up to those clear rules of conduct which revelation has graciously prescribed. He possessed by temper every moral virtue ; by

religion every christian grace. He had a humanity that melted at every distress; a charity which not only thought no evil, but suspected none. He exercised his profession with a skill and integrity, which nothing could equal but the disinterested motive that animated his labours, or the amiable modesty which accompanied all his virtues. He employed his industry, not to gratify his own desires; no man indulged himself less: not to accumulate useless wealth; no man more disdained so unworthy a pursuit: it was for the decent advancement of his family, for the generous assistance of his friends, for the ready relief of the indigent. How often did he exert his distinguished abilities yet refused the reward of them, in defence of *the widow, the fatherless, and him that had none to help him!* In a word, few have ever passed a more useful, not one a more blameless life; and his whole time was employed either in doing good, or in meditating it. He died on the 6th day of April, 1743, and lies buried under the cloister of Lincoln's Inn chapel. MEM. PAT. OPT. MER. FIL. DIC.

T H E
P R E F A C E.

THE design of the the following treatise, is to awaken in the minds of unthinking men, a serious sense of religion and a true concern for the interest of their immortal souls : a design, at all times seasonable and necessary, but more especially at this time, when we see such numbers of persons carried away with the love of pleasure, and such arts invented and methods used to gratify their corrupt and vicious taste.

Whoever reflects, with a due concern, upon the excesses and debaucheries which have overspread this nation, and has any regard for the honour of God, and the in-

terest of that holy religion which Christ Jesus came down from heaven to establish upon the earth, will easily be persuaded to think, that all endeavours possible ought to be used, to stem the torrent of wickedness that has broken in upon us, and to prevent the mischievous effects of those *public diversions*, which the generality of people are grown so fond of; I mean the masquerades and plays; those seminaries of vice and irreligion, where every thing is contrived to inflame the passions, and corrupt the tender minds of young persons, and which, I am persuaded, have greatly contributed to that general neglect of God and religion, which is so visible among us.

Whether any thing that is here offered, will be effectual to draw men off from the love of those *deceitful vanities*, I cannot say: but sure I am, (if the scripture is to be the rule of our practice, as most undoubtedly it is) it must be the duty of every one, not only to take care that he gives no encouragement by his *example*, to these licentious and insnaring entertainments (to which I doubt not but many owe their fatal

miscarriages,) but to do what in him lies, to dissuade others, especially *those under his care*, from resorting to places of so much danger and infection.

It must be confessed, that it is no easy matter to prevail on those who are carried away by the false maxims and practices of a corrupt and debauched world, to abandon their sensual gratifications, for the more refined pleasures of virtue and religion : However, the difficulty of the work should not discourage any one from attempting it. I have therefore endeavoured, according to my ability, to lay before the reader the advantages attending a good life ; in hopes, that whoever seriously considers what is here said, will be convinced, that there is no pleasure to be compared with that of a good conscience ; and that religion really is, what it was designed by the great Author of it to be, the only solid foundation of our present, as well as future happiness.

I am sensible, that what is here offered, hath been with much greater advantage inculcated in many of those excellent dis-

courses, which are already extant : yet when I consider how much good has been done by these small tracts, which have been printed and dispersed of late years, I am encouraged to hope that this little treatise may be of some service ; at least, to check that prodigious thirst after sensual pleasures, which seems to be the disease of the present age, and which must undoubtedly destroy the love of God, wherever it prevails.

I have added some prayers at the end of this book, not with an intention to prescribe to any one, but to assist those that are not furnished with better helps ; well knowing how *important* a duty Prayer is, and how highly necessary it is for every good christian to be frequent in his addresses to the throne of grace, if ever he expects the favour of God, and hopes *to find grace to help in time of need.*

May God of his great goodness give a blessing to these weak endeavours, and make them instrumental to his glory, and the good of souls!

THE
GREAT IMPORTANCE
OF A
RELIGIOUS LIFE.

CHAP. I.

“**W**HAT must I do to be saved?” was a question, which the trembling and astonished jailer put to *Paul* and *Silas*, when he saw the prison doors opened in a miraculous manner : a question of the utmost moment and importance, and which it nearly concerns us all to be well resolved in. For, if there be a life after this, and we do not die like the “beasts that perish ;” if death does not put a final period to our beings ; but

when this short life is ended, we enter upon the regions of eternity, and shall be forever happy or miserable, according as we demean ourselves in this short time of trial and probation : If this be the state and condition of mankind (as the voice of reason, the dictates of conscience, and the holy scriptures, do loudly proclaim it is) how does it behove every one of us to inquire, what we must do to attain everlasting life ; and to consider, whether we are in the way that leads to heaven and happiness ? or, if we have been so unhappy as to wander out of it, how we may recover ourselves and return to it again.

This is an inquiry which deserves our utmost diligence and attention. For if we are ignorant of the will of God, or, knowing it, will not follow or be led by that unerring light, but suffer ourselves to be hurried away by our unruly passions in the pursuit of the things of this life ; we are wretched and miserable, blind and naked, notwithstanding all our attainments ; and we shall one day be convinced to our sorrow, that there is no folly like that of preferring things tem-

poral to things eternal. Whatever "the children of this world" may think, and how much soever they may applaud their own wisdom in contriving schemes to be rich and great; yet if their chief care and concern is taken up about these things, it is certain they will be found *fools* when weighed in the balance of true wisdom.

He that is truly wise will consider that he has a soul, as well as a body, to take care of; a spiritual and immortal substance which can never die; but when enlarged from that prison in which it is now confined, must live for ever, either in happiness or misery. Shall we then be so foolish, as to confine our ambitious pursuits within the narrow limits of this world, without considering what will be the condition of our souls hereafter? Shall we labour and toil for the "meat that perisheth;" and be cold and indifferent about the momentous concerns of eternity? Shall we spare no pains in order to increase our temporal estates, and to lay up "goods for many years;" when we know not, but "this night our souls may be required of us?" And if we have made no pro-

vision for their everlasting welfare, what will it avail us that we have been rich and great in this world ?

“ The fashion of this world passeth away,” and all the glory and splendor of it will, in a little time, have an end. How great, then is the folly, and how deplorable will the condition of that man be, who, instead of “ seeking the kingdom of God ” and his righteousness in the first place, has consumed his days in seeking after the honours and riches of this world, and has tired himself out in the pursuit of those things, which are of no value in the sight of God ? Wretched stupidity ! “ What shall it profit a man if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul ? ” Time bears no proportion to eternity. The most exalted pleasures of this life, which at best are but of a short continuance, can never compensate for the loss of that happiness which “ God has prepared for them that love him.” How miserably then will that man be deceived, who places all his hopes and happiness in the poor and

empty satisfaction of a sensual life ; who looks no farther than the present time, and lives as if he cared not what became of him hereafter, so he may but enjoy “ the pleasures of sin for a season ?”

But some, perhaps, may ask, where is the man so abandoned to folly and madness, as to be content, for the sake of a present short-lived happiness, to be miserable forever hereafter ? I wish indeed there were none such : But alas ! there are too many who make this sad choice. Not that any one chooses evil for the sake of evil, or prefers misery before happiness ; (for a desire of happiness is inseparable from our nature) but in the scripture account of things, he is said to choose destruction, who walks in the broad way that leads to it. For God has been pleased “to set before us life and death, ‘ blessing and cursing :” ^q Rewards on the one hand, to encourage our obedience ; and punishments on the other, to deter us from sin. And as he that obeys the commandments of God chooses *life*, so

(q) Deuteronomy xxx. 19.

he that transgresses them, chooses *death* ; *that* death which God has threatened to the sinner, even death eternal. For the “wages ‘ of sin is death,” and he that chooses the one (let his pretences be what they will) must be said to choose the other; because he knows (at least it is his own fault, if he does not know) that “God will render to every man ‘ according to his deeds : To them, who, by ‘ patient continuance in well-doing, seek for ‘ glory and honour and immortality, eternal ‘ life ; but unto them that are contentious, ‘ and do not obey the truth, but obey un- ‘ righteousness ; indignation and wrath, tri- ‘ bulation and anguish, upon every soul of ‘ man that doeth evil.”

See, then, what a wretched piece of folly the sinner is guilty of, (how wise soever he may think himself, and how much soever he may despise the sober part of mankind) when he first enters upon a life of wickedness. For he is then evidencing to all the world, that *life* and *death* being set before him, he has determined his choice to the

latter:—A choice so absurd and unaccountable, that did not experience convince us of its being often made, we could hardly think it possible for a rational creature to be so blind. O blessed God ! hast thou set before us happiness and misery, joys unspeakable and full of glory on the one hand, and torments endless and intolerable on the other ! hast thou given us the light of reason to guide, and superadded that of thy Holy Spirit to illuminate and instruct us ; hast thou implanted in our natures a dread of, and aversion from, pain and misery, and an insatiable and never-ceasing thirst after happiness ; and is it possible for us, after all this, to be so blind and senseless, such enemies to our own souls, and so regardless of their eternal welfare, as to prefer the dark ways of sin and misery, before those blessed paths which lead to the bright regions of bliss and glory !—Alas ! such wretched fools are too many among us, who, notwithstanding all that thou hast done for us, will not hearken nor be advised, but run headlong into the ways of sin and destruction.

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This indeed is a melancholy consideration, and what shall we say to awaken men out of this fatal lethargy, and to inspire them with a just sense of their danger? what, but intreat them to consider, that “unless they repent, they will certainly perish. For the wrath of God is revealed against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men :”—and though “God winked at the times of ignorance; yet now he commandeth all men every where to repent; because he hath appointed a day, in which he will judge the world in righteousness, by that man whom he hath ordained; whereof he hath given assurance unto all men, in that he hath raised him from the dead.” (1) A day when the sinners “will in vain call to the mountains and rocks to fall on them, and to hide them from the face of him that sitteth on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb.” (2)—And when “the great day of his wrath is come, who shall” then “be able to stand?”—who indeed shall be able to stand before the face of an incensed

(1) Acts xvii. 30. 31.

(2) Revelations vi. 16. 17.

God, and hear that dreadful sentence pronounced against him, “depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels?” —Ah ! who can bear an eternity of horror and despair ? “Who can dwell” with implacable fiends “in everlasting burnings ?”^u

These are things of infinite moment and concern, and are sufficient to shew us the great necessity of denying the criminal indulgence of our passions and appetites, and of living virtuously and piously in the present world. But because the weightiest truths, when their consequences are not immediately felt, are too apt to be disregarded ; I shall enlarge a little upon the great importance of a religious life, by endeavouring to shew these *three* things :

I. That there is no solid happiness to be attained in this life, but in the practice of religion.

II. That as religion is the only thing which can make us happy while we live, so there is nothing but a good life can give us

any comfortable prospect, when we come to die.

III. That a conscientious observance of the duties of religion, will not only make us live happily, and die comfortably; but, what is infinitely beyond all this, will most certainly be rewarded with eternal happiness in the life to come.

First then, I shall endeavour to shew, that there is no solid happiness to be attained in this life, but in the practice of religion.

It has been a great artifice of our spiritual enemy, to possess the minds of unthinking men with an opinion, that religion is a sour, morose, ill-natured thing; a foe to whatever is pleasant and cheerful; and that whoever engages in the practice of it, must from that instant, renounce all the pleasures and enjoyments of life. But as the "devil is the father of lies," it is no wonder that he sets every thing before us in a false and deceitful light: By these means it was, that he deceived our first unhappy parents, and by the same methods it is that he endeavours to betray their too credulous posterity. He is

continually representing "evil as good, and
"good as evil; putting darkness for light,
"and light for darkness." He knows that
there is such a beauty and comeliness in re-
ligion, as no one can behold but with love
and admiration; and therefore he endea-
vours to draw a veil over its lustre, to re-
present it the very reverse of what it really
is, and to prejudice our minds against its
reception; and, unhappily, in these attempts
he has been but too successful.

But would men be persuaded once to
make the experiment; would they forsake
the dangerous paths of sin, and walk in
the way that leads to everlasting happiness;
would they retire from the noise and tumult
of a loose and disordered life, and listen to
the still voice of reason and religion, they
would soon find how grossly they have been
cheated, and wonder, perhaps, how it was
possible they could so long have been deceiv-
ed. They would soon discover, and from
thence admire, "the beauty of holiness,"
and be thoroughly convinced, that there is
no pleasure like that of a good conscience;

no real or solid happiness, but what results from a life of virtue and piety. They would then bless the happy change they had made, and would not part with their interest in heaven for the greatest enjoyments this world can afford. All those empty pleasures, which once captivated and ensnared them, would then appear mean and contemptible, and nothing would be thought of any real value, but what sets them forward in the way of salvation.

O happy man ! (whoever thou art) that hast made this noble trial, and by a true and sincere repentance art restored to the favour and love of God ! Thou hast "turned away thine eyes from beholding vanity," and canst now look up with confidence to God, and relish the pleasures of a virtuous life. How is thy mind filled with love, and joy, and admiration, when thou considerest, that by the grace and goodness of God, thou art rescued out of the jaws of the devouring lion, and art delivered from fear and shame, and self-condemnation ; the sure attendants of a guilty conscience !

We may have some idea of the happiness of such a man, by considering what is the pleasure of a redeemed captive, when restored to his country, his liberty, and his friends; or of a mariner got safe to shore, after a storm, wherein he was every moment in expectation of being swallowed up in the deep. And yet it must be owned, the comparison falls infinitely short: For what slavery is so great as that of a soul under the bondage and dominion of sin? Or what are the most terrible dangers of the sea, when compared with those to which the sinner is continually exposed?

But have not some made trial of religion, and yet have found no satisfaction therein? as may be concluded from their returning again to their former course of life. It is true, there are some instances (and sad ones they are, God knows,) of such, who “after they have been once enlightened, and have tasted of the heavenly gift, and been made partakers of the Holy Ghost, have yet fallen away,” and entered again into a life of sin and debauchery. But has this been owing to a dislike of religion? By no means;

but rather to a want of care in not avoiding the company which has formerly seduced them, or to a forgetfulness, or at least a neglect, of the vows and resolutions they had made ; or, it may be, they have fallen under some violent temptation, which they have not so vigorously resisted, as they might and ought to have done. Instances of this kind, however, I hope are but rare, while on the other hand, how many are there, who have forsaken the company and conversation of the wicked ; and having lamented the folly and madness of their past lives, have, from being the slaves of sin and Satan, become the servants of God ? These will tell you, from their own experience, that they have found more true peace and satisfaction in conquering one vicious habit, than ever they met with in the most sensual enjoyment ; that all their past sinful pleasures yield them now no other fruits, than those bitter ones of shame and remorse : whereas in religion they find such a spring of comfort continually refreshing their souls, as they would not part with for all this world can possibly give them. They find such a plea-

sure in the service of God, as make them with holy *David* desire “to dwell in the ‘house of the Lord all the days of their lives, ‘to behold the fair beauty of the Lord, and ‘to visit his temple;”^v and like him esteem it better to “be a door-keeper in the house ‘of the Lord,” one of the meanest of God’s servants, “than to dwell in the tents of un- ‘godliness,” amidst the delights and pleasures of a wicked and debauched world.

Indeed, nothing can give a man so exquisite a satisfaction, as to reflect upon the actions of a well-spent life ; to consider that he has made God his friend, and secured an interest in the favour of him, who is the eternal source and fountain of all good ; infinite in mercy and loving-kindness, as well as in power ; not only able, but willing and ready, to help and assist him in all difficulties : a Being, to whom he may have recourse under every trial and temptation, under the greatest calamities and troubles of life ; to whom he may lay open all his wants and infirmities, pour forth all his sorrows

and afflictions, and may at all times with confidence look up, as being assured that he has a powerful intercessor in heaven, “Jesus ‘Christ the righteous, in whom we have redemption through his blood, even the forgiveness of sins ;”^w and “who is able to ‘save them to the uttermost that come unto ‘God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make ‘intercession for them.”^x I say, for a man to consider these things ; to think that he is answering the end of his creation ; that he is doing the work for which he is sent into the world ; that he is become a “member of ‘Christ, a child of God, and an inheritor of ‘the kingdom of heaven :” How must such thoughts cheer and refresh his soul with a solid, and lasting pleasure ; in comparison whereof, all the vain and transitory enjoyments of this world are as nothing !

But then, on the contrary, for a wicked man to consider, that “the face of the Lord ‘is against them that do evil,”^y and consequently that he is among the number of

^(w) Colossians i. 14.

^(x) Hebrews vii. 25.

^(y) Psalm xxxiv. 16.

those against whom God has declared his displeasure ; that, instead of “ working out ‘ his salvation with fear and trembling,” he is daily “ heaping up to himself wrath against ‘ the day of wrath :” And though (it may be) he is now “ clothed with purple and fine ‘ linen, and fares sumptuously every day ;” though he may at present live in all the gaiety and splendor, the pomp and luxury of a great fortune, yet there will come a time, (and, for aught he knows, it may not be many moments off) when he shall be stript of all his enjoyments and possessions, and want even “ a drop of water to cool his tongue :” — Surely, such thoughts as these must strike the sinner through with horror and amazement, and like *Belshazzar*, when he saw “ the hand-writing upon the wall,” make him tremble, even in the midst of his greatest mirth and jollity.

And can a man with such reflections in his mind (and these, or something like them, will be sure to haunt the sinner) be said to be happy ? Are the stings of conscience, the terrors of an Almighty Judge, and the dreadful expectations of God’s vengeance, con-

sistent with a state of happiness?—Alas ! the libertine may flatter himself as he pleases ; and think to deceive others, by putting on an air of gaiety and pleasantness ; but, it is certain, his mind can never be long at rest, while he carries about him a faithful monitor, which will be continually upbraiding him for his folly and madness ; representing before his eyes the dangers he is exposed to, and crossing him as it were, in his way, while he is in full pursuit of his unlawful pleasures.—And though he may perhaps be able sometimes to silence the clamours of this troublesome companion, by mere dint of noise and extravagance ; yet when his passions abate, (as they will not always bear to be upon the stretch,) and the man grows cool, he will find the upbraidings of his conscience return upon him with renewed violence. And the shame and anguish, the horror and confusion, he will then feel, will infinitely overbalance all the satisfactions he can meet with, in the enjoyment of his sinful pleasures.

I own, indeed, this is not the case of every sinner. A man, by a long course of wick-

edness, may arrive at such an hardened state as to be incapable of any virtuous impressions; his soul may be seared, as it were with an hot iron, and be fallen into such a deep and fatal lethargy, as nothing perhaps shall be able to awaken, but that misery which will never end. But no one, I believe, will think this to be a state of happiness.

The truth is, if we consider a wicked man with respect to this world only, abstractedly from what will be his portion hereafter, we shall find that there are many and great evils to which he is exposed, besides the torments of a guilty conscience. Are not pains, diseases, and a broken constitution, the natural effects of lust and intemperance? Embarrassment, poverty, and dependence, of pride and prodigality? Does not passion, anger, and revenge, frequently expose men to mischievous, and, many times, fatal quarrels and contentions? Robbery, theft, and murder, bring upon others, a shameful and untimely end? How many evils are there in the world, which are the immediate effects of

men's vices? "From whence come wars
' and fightings among you?" says St. James;
" come they not hence, even of your lusts
' that war in your members?" And from
the same fatal source are derived many of
those other evils and calamities which some
men labour under. If we trace them to their
original, we shall find them to be the natu-
ral fruits of men's covetous and ambitious
desires; of the gratification of their unruly
lusts and passions. And, in truth, how can
it be otherwise, if we consider, " That the
' curse of the Lord is in the house of the
' wicked;" and " that evil pursueth sin-
' ners?" How can any thing but misery at-
tend him, who has provoked the anger of an
Almighty God?

Let us now consider what is the por-
tion of good men in this world; and
whether the practice of virtue and righteous-
ness is not the most likely way a man can
take to promote his present as well as future
happiness, and to make his pilgrimage here
on earth, a state of tolerable ease and com-
fort.

Solomon had as much experience of the pleasure of the world as ever man had, and tried as many ways to make himself happy as his heart could well devise ; having “ kept nothing from his eyes that they desired, nor withheld his heart from any joy ?” and yet, when he came to cast up the account, he found this to be the sum of it, “ that all was vanity and vexation of spirit.” Accordingly, when he is instructing his son in the ways of true happiness, he advises him to “ get wisdom and understanding :” for “ wisdom,” says he, “ is the principal thing ; therefore get wisdom ; and with all thy getting, get understanding.” And, as an encouragement to do so, he tells him, that “ happy is the man that findeth wisdom, and the man that getteth understanding : For the merchandize of it is better than the merchandize of silver, and the gain thereof than fine gold. She is more precious than rubies, and all the things thou canst desire are not to be compared unto her. Length of days is in her right hand, and in her left hand riches and honour. Her ways are ways

‘ of pleasantness, and all her paths are
‘ peace.” This wisdom and understand-
ing which he recommends, as a treasure of
so great value, is not “the wisdom of this
‘ world,” for that is “foolishness with
‘ God; but it is “the wisdom that cometh
‘ from above,” which will make us wise un-
to salvation; the wisdom of living in the fear
and love of God, and in a strict obedience
to his commandments. “The fear of the
‘ Lord,” says he, “is the beginning of wis-
‘ dom, and the knowledge of the Holy is
‘ understanding.” Or, as it is in *Job*,
“Behold the fear of the Lord, that is wis-
‘ dom; and to depart from evil is under-
‘ standing.”

Here then, is the excellency of religion,
that it not only secures to us a reversion of
endless happiness, but makes our lives at pre-
sent, easy and delightful; the very paths of
religion are pleasant, as their termination is
happy. It is true, indeed, that vice has its
present pleasures as well as virtue; but then
there is this difference between them; the
pleasures of sin are unsubstantial, short-lived,
and only varnished over; and can never be

purchased but at a subsequent expence of health, trouble, or peace of mind, greatly beyond their value ; for such is the nature of things, that as virtue is its own reward, so vice is its own punishment. But those pleasures which result from the practice of virtue and piety, are substantial, sincere, steady and secure : they leave nothing like uneasiness upon the mind, and are neither accompanied with shame, nor followed by remorse. “ We may talk of pleasures and enjoyments,” says a great prelate² of our church, “ but no man ever truly found them, till he became acquainted with God ; and was made sensible of his love, and partaker of his heavenly favours, and lived in an entire friendship and communion with him.” No certainly ; religion is the only happiness of a rational creature, the only thing that can afford us real satisfaction ; all other pleasures are, at best, short and transitory ; but in religion we find a satisfaction which is solid, substantial, and lasting ; a delight which will not only bear the test of reflection, but admits of unlimited increase.

(2) Archbishop of York.

“Whenever,” (to use the words of another excellent person) “an action is good and virtuous, it is not only natural, but carries with it a felicity flowing from, and essential to, the very nature of it. Paternal, conjugal, filial affection; are they not full of delight? Justice, friendship, beneficence, all the offices of humanity, and the whole train of virtues; does not the exercise of them administer the most sincere and lasting joy? This is indeed, so truly the case, that in persons of undebauched minds, the pleasure attending virtuous actions leads almost irresistibly to the performance of them: We have, when we are about them, no boding, misgiving thoughts, no forbidding whispers, no secret reluctance: Comfort, complacency of mind, and a gratulating conscience, always accompany such actions.

What a perpetual source of joy and comfort is a good conscience! It gladdens the heart, refreshes the soul, and imparts to the mind, a constant serenity and cheerfulness, infinitely to be preferred before the noisy mirth of fools and madmen. He that

is possessed of this inestimable jewel, has a treasure of more value than all the riches of the East : a treasure, which, as the world did not give, so neither can it take away ; and so long as he retains that invaluable blessing, he can never be truly miserable : For as a good conscience gives a relish to all our outward enjoyments, so it takes off the edge of the sharpest afflictions ; and not only enables a man to bear up under present evils, but fortifies him against the dread and apprehension of future ones. It arms him with a firmness of mind, a degree of fortitude and resolution, which the greatest misfortunes cannot shake : It places him, as it were, on a rock, against which, though the storm of adversity may beat, yet, knowing his foundation to be secure, he contemplates the scene without alarm ;—in the midst of the tempest his mind is at peace.^a *Solomon* has observed, that “ the wicked flee, when

- (a) Tho' hosts of dangers press around,
 Unmov'd shall he maintain his ground,
 While CONSCIENCE smiles with angel's face :—
 The soul that's fill'd with virtues' light,
 Shines brightest in affliction's night,
 And sees in darkness beams of grace. •

‘ no man purfueth ; but the righteous
‘ are bold as a lion.” And the holy
Pſalmiſt tells us, that “ a good man ſhall not
‘ be afraid of any evil tidings ; for his heart
‘ ſtandeth faſt and believeth in the Lord.”
“ The Lord,” ſays he, “ is my light and my
‘ ſalvation ; whom then ſhall I fear ? The
‘ Lord is the ſtrength of my life ; of whom
‘ ſhall I be afraid ? Yea, though I walk
‘ through the valley of the ſhadow of death, I
‘ will fear no evil ; for thou art with me, thy
‘ rod and thy ſtaff comfort me.” What indeed
ſhould he fear, whoſe ſoul is anchored upon
the Rock of Ages ? “ Who has the God of
‘ Jacob for his help ; whoſe hope is in the
“ Lord his God ?” He knows that he is in
the hands of a moſt gracious and merciful
Father, and is fully perſuaded that “ all
‘ things ſhall work together for good to
‘ them that love him :” He is aſſured, that
“ the eye of the Lord is upon them that fear
‘ him ; upon them that hope in his mercy ;
‘ to deliver their ſoul from death, and to
‘ keep them alive in famine.” And therefore
he can rejoice in God, even in the miſt of
trouble and affliction, when he conſiders,

that as his afflictions come from the hands of a good and gracious Being, who “ does ‘ not willingly afflict the children of men ;’ ” so he knows, that “ as the time is short,” they can be of no long continuance, “ and ‘ that,’ ” if he makes a right use of them, “ they will work for him a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory.”

See then the folly and madness of those “ that take not God for their strength ; but ‘ trust to the multitude of their riches, and ‘ strengthen themselves in their wickedness,’ ” and think by these means to be fortified against the evils of life !—Alas ! There are numberless calamities, from which neither wealth or power can ever shelter us : and therefore, when a man relinquishes his trust in God, and takes sanctuary in the strength of his wickedness, he will find himself miserably mistaken, when the day of adversity comes upon him. The weight of sin, superadded to that of temporal evils, is a burthen greater than any one is able to bear ; for certain it is, whatever some persons may think, there is nothing can alleviate the weight of any great

affliction but a good life. It is *that* and *that* only, which can support a man in "the evil 'days of his pilgrimage.'" Every other means, however promising, will most assuredly be found vain and ineffectual. The consciousness of having in some measure, lived piously and unblameably, will enable a man to look up with a cheerful assurance to the great supporter of his being ; enable him to see through the darkest clouds of sorrow and affliction, and to behold with an eye of faith that heavenly country to which he is travelling, and where he hopes shortly to arrive. And this, though it will not wholly remove the afflictions which God is sometimes pleased, for wise and good ends, to send upon some men in this life, nor render them insensible of their troubles ; yet it will very much diminish and enervate the force of those afflictions, and enable us, with some degree of courage and cheerfulness, to bear up under them. For how strong a consolation must it be for a good man, in such a situation, to contemplate a state where there shall be "no more sorrow, no more pain, 'and where all tears shall be wiped,'" forever

“from his eyes !” Or, if he is under the pressure of want and necessity, how must it support and relieve his sinking spirits to consider, that he has a Father in heaven, who “will never leave him, nor forsake him,” however he may at present think fit to deprive him of outward comforts ; and that there is no person in the world so great, so prosperous, or so happy, but that, having a little patience, he himself shall be more so !

The sum of what I have said upon this head, is so elegantly expressed by the author of a late essay upon the omnipresence of God, that, I believe, I shall leave this reflexion more strongly upon my reader’s mind, if I give him the words of that unknown, but excellent, writer. “How happy (says he, speaking of the intercourse which subsists between God and the souls of good men,) “how happy is an intellectual being, who, by prayer and meditation, by virtue and good works, opens this communication between God and his own soul ! Though the whole creation frowns upon and all nature looks black about him, he has a light and support within him,

which are able to cheer his mind, and bear him up in the midst of all those horrors with which he is encompassed. He knows that his helper is at hand, and is always nearer to him than any thing else can be, which is capable of annoying or terrifying him. In the midst of calumny or contempt, he attends to that Being, who whispers better things within his soul, and whom he looks upon as his defender, his glory, and the “lifter up of his head.” In his deepest solitude and retirement, he knows that he is in company with the greatest of Beings; and perceives within himself such real sensations of his presence, as are more delightful than any thing that can be met with in the conversation of his *creatures*. Even in the hour of death, he considers the pains of his dissolution to be nothing else but the breaking down of that partition, which stands between his soul and the sight of that Being, who is always present with him, and is about to manifest itself to him in fulness of joy.

“If we would be thus happy,” to proceed in the words of this pious author, “and thus sensible of our Maker’s presence, from

the secret effects of his mercy and goodness, we must keep such a watch over all our thoughts, that, in the language of the scripture, "his soul may have pleasure in us." We must take care not to grieve his Holy Spirit, but endeavour to make the meditations of our hearts always acceptable in his sight, that he may thereby be induced to dwell in us. The light of nature could direct *Seneca* to this doctrine, in a very remarkable passage among his epistles ; *sacer inest in nobis spiritus, bonorum malorumque custos & observator ; & quemadmodum nos illum tractamus, ita & ille nos.* There is a Holy Spirit residing in us, who watches and observes both good and evil men, and will treat us after the same manner that we treat him. But I shall conclude, says our author, this discourse with those more emphatical words in divine revelation ; "if any man love me, he ' will keep my word, and my Father will ' love him, and we will come unto him, ' and make our abode with him."

I have thus far considered a good life,
First, as it fills our minds with joy and

peace, and delivers us from those uneasy reflections, which haunt and torment the sinner : And, *Secondly*, as it is a means to secure us from those evils, which are the immediate effects of sin, and to support us under such misfortunes as God, no doubt for the best purposes, often permits good men to be afflicted with, during their pilgrimage on earth. I shall now consider it with respect to some other advantages it has above that of a wicked course of actions : and I hope it will fully appear, that there is nothing so likely to secure a man's happiness in this world, as a strict observance of the precepts and duties of religion.

St. *Peter* lays it down as an undoubted truth, that whoever desires to live happily, must live piously. " He that will love life," says he, " and see good days, let him refrain his tongue from evil, and his lips that they speak no guile ; let him eschew evil, and do good." And the reason why temporal prosperity is so likely to be the portion of the religious man, is, because " the eyes of the Lord are over the righteous, and his ears are open unto their pray-

ers ; but the face of the Lord is against
‘ them that do evil.” It is very evident,
from the whole tenor of the scriptures, that
the providence of God does very much in-
terest itself in the care and support of good
men in this world. “ O taste and see,”
says the holy *Psalmist*, “ how gracious the
‘ Lord is : Blessed is the man, that trusteth
‘ in him. O fear ye the Lord, ye that are
‘ his saints ; for they that fear him, lack
‘ nothing. The lions do lack and suffer
‘ hunger ; but they who seek the Lord, shall
‘ want no manner of thing that is good.”
How remarkable are the words of the wise-
son of *Sirach* to this purpose ! “ Look at the
‘ generations of old,” says he ; “ Did ever
‘ any trust in the Lord, and was confounded ?
‘ or did any abide in his fear, and was for-
‘ saken ? or whom did he ever despise, that
called upon him ?” Add to this that ob-
servation of holy *David* ; “ I have been
‘ young, and now am old, and yet saw I
‘ never the righteous forsaken, nor his seed
‘ begging their bread.” As on the con-
trary, “ I have seen,” says he, “ the ungod-
‘ ly in great power, and flourishing like a

‘green bay-tree : I went by, and lo ! he was
‘gone ; I sought him, but his place could
‘no where be found.”

It is certain, that God is a Being of infinite purity and holiness : and as he must therefore hate iniquity, with the utmost hatred so there is no doubt, but a serious and conscientious observance of the duties of religion, will recommend us to his favour and protection. He that “ feeds the fowls
‘of the air, and clothes the grass of the field,” and is of a nature so diffusively bountiful, “ as to make his sun to rise on the
‘evil, as well as on the good, and sends his
‘rain both on the just and the unjust,” will undoubtedly in a more peculiar manner, bless the labours of an honest and industrious man, and provide for those who love and fear him, and keep his commandments. I would not be understood to say, that no wicked man has ever prospered, nor a good man been unsuccessful ; for it pleases God many times, for wise and good ends, to suffer the righteous to fall into great perplexities and distresses. However, since the scriptures assure us, “ that the Lord will bless the

“righteous, and compass him with favour
“as with a shield; that wealth and riches
“shall be in the house of him that feareth
“the Lord, and delighteth in his command-
“ments; that blessings shall be upon his
“head; that the house of the righteous shall
“stand, and the tabernacle of the upright
“shall flourish; that it shall be well with them
“that fear God;” and in short, that “god-
“liness has the promise of the life that now
“is,” as well as “of that which is to come;”

I think we may certainly conclude, that a strict observance of the duties of the christian religion, is the most likely way we can take to prosper in the world, and to make our lives comfortable and happy.

And of this truth we may be convinced, not only from the testimony of scripture, but from the reason and nature of things. For, let any one consider whether he that is just and true in all his dealings, honest and sincere in all his professions, and faithful to his word and all his engagements; who is diligent and industrious in his calling; who makes it his constant rule to do unto all men as he would they should do unto him; and

is so far from endeavouring to over-reach and defraud his neighbour, that he chooses rather to forego the greatest gain, than purchase it at the expence of the least injustice : Is it not I say, much more probable, that such an one should enlarge his fortune in the world, than he who acts the very reverse of all this, who practises all the arts of cheating and lying, of over-reaching and circumvention, and stoops to every meanness and dishonesty which he thinks will turn to his present profit ; who considers not so much, how honest and upright his actions are, as how profitable ; and cares not what his neighbour suffers by his injustice, if he himself does but get by it ? Such an one, when he comes to be known, (and he will not be able long to conceal himself) will be shunned and despised by all good men ; he will certainly lose his reputation, and with it the means of getting forward in the world. On the other hand, the honest and upright man (besides the blessing of God, which he cannot fail of) will be sure to meet with the regard and esteem of all who know him : he will have few, if any enemies, but many

friends, and those some of the wisest and best of men, who will be always ready to assist him, and gladly embrace every opportunity of promoting his interest and happiness.

2. Another great blessing of life, and that which gives a relish to every other enjoyment, is health ; and who is more likely to obtain this blessing, than the religious man ? For will not temperance, sobriety and virtue, (duties which he practises) conduce more to a sound and vigorous constitution of body, than surfeiting and drunkenness, lust and intemperance ; the mischievous effects of which are too visible to be denied ? “ Who hath woe ? ” said *Salomon*, “ who hath sorrow ? who hath contentions ? who hath babling ? who hath wounds without cause ? who hath redness of eyes ? They that tarry long at the wine, they that go to seek mixed wine.” What sickness and diseases have some brought upon themselves, merely by their excesses and debaucheries ! Diseases, which have not terminated with their own lives, but have been entailed upon their unhappy posterity ! And how can

it be otherwise, unless it should please God to change the nature of things? For if men will run into those excesses, it is no wonder if some fatal distemper should be the consequence : and when a vicious or debauched parent has brought disease into his own bones, though the children may be free from the vices of their father, yet they frequently feel the mischievous effects of those vices all their lives.

3. Again, a cheerful and contented mind is another great blessing of life ; for without it nothing in this world can make us happy. And by what means is this to be obtained, but by the practice of religion ? *That* will teach him to resign his will to God, to submit to all the dispensations of his providence ; to be patient under every affliction, easy under every misfortune, and cheerful and contented whatever may be his lot ; well knowing that God is his friend, that the Almighty Ruler of the universe is his protector and preserver ; that he does not willingly afflict the children of men, and that he will most assuredly make all things work together for the benefit of those who

put their trust in him. And how quiet, easy and contented must such a man be under every event ! He has learned with *St. Paul*, “ how to abound, and how to want ; ” and as he is not elated with the one, so neither is he depressed with the other, but passes through life with a cheerful, even, and contented mind, undisturbed by that inquietude, impatience, and discontent, from which the proud, the envious and the ambitious, are seldom, if ever, free.

4. Peace is another blessing, highly conducive to the happiness of life ; and to this the religious man has, perhaps, an exclusive claim. He considers, that “ if God so loved us, as to send his Son to be the propitiation for our sins, we ought also to love one another : ” and therefore he is an enemy to no man, but kind and obliging to all ; and should any one be so unreasonable as to reward him “ evil for good,” he attempts not to retaliate, nor thinks of gratifying his revenge, but, in imitation of his blessed Saviour, he does “ good to them that hate him, and prays for them that despitefully use him and persecute him. When

' he is reviled, he reviles not again ; when
 ' he suffers, he threatens not, but commit-
 ' teth himself to him that judgeth righteous-
 ' ly." He resolves, as *St. Paul* advises, " to
 ' put away all bitterness, and wrath, and
 ' anger, and clamour, and evil-speaking,
 ' with all malice ;" and endeavours to
 attain that heavenly wisdom which is
 " pure, peaceable, gentle, and easy to be
 ' intreated, full of mercy and good fruits."
 And this principle of charity and good will
 to mankind, as it renders the mind quiet and
 easy, calm and composed ; so it makes a
 man not only happy in himself, but a blef-
 sing and comfort to those around him ; and
 consequently attracts the esteem and admi-
 ration of all who experience the benign in-
 fluence of so divine a temper. " Great
 ' peace," says the *Psalmist*, " have they
 ' which love thy law, and nothing shall of-
 ' fend them." And the *prophet* assures us,
 " That the work of righteousness shall be
 ' peace, and the effect of righteousness, qui-
 ' etness, and assurance forever." But, on the
 other hand, the life of an angry and re-
 vengeful man is one continued scene of

storm and tempest ; he is “ like a troubled ‘ sea, whose waters cast up mire and dirt.” He is a stranger to peace, and all the happy effects of it : for where “ envying and strife ‘ is, there is confusion and every evil work.” His mind is continually restless and uneasy, agitated with the violence of unruly passions, which lead him on from one evil to another, and frequently terminate in mischievous, and sometimes fatal consequences. In what a state of wretchedness must that man be, who is possessed of a spirit so directly contrary to that of the gospel ! How little can *he* taste of the true happiness of life, whose mind is always disordered and out of tune ! Such a person may indeed *possess* a great deal of the world, but can *enjoy* very little of it : For what enjoyment can all the means of happiness yield to that man, who has no peace in his own mind ; who is at enmity with himself, and with almost every one else ? Is it possible for a man of such a temper to be happy, even in the midst of the greatest prosperity ? No, certainly ; it is the meek-spirited, whom our Saviour hath pronounced blessed : They “ shall inherit

‘the earth, and,’ in the language of the *Psalmist*, “be refreshed in the multitude of ‘peace.’” These it is, who find a real comfort in whatever they possess; and should their portion happen to be but small, yet that little, being enjoyed in peace and quiet, and with a contented mind, will undoubtedly afford them a much greater, and more real satisfaction, than even an affluent fortune can produce to those of an opposite disposition.

But a virtuous and pious man has yet another very important advantage over a vicious and irreligious one, as to the present world, which is this; that the former has much more reason than the latter, to expect a dutiful and obedient offspring: For if it pleases God to bless a good man with children, he begins very early to instil into their tender minds, the principles of virtue and religion; he teaches them “to remember their Creator in the days of their ‘youth,’” and brings them up in the fear and admonition of the Lord. He sets before them the example of a holy and religious life; and endeavours to wean them from

the pride and vanity of the world, and from those vices, which tend only to make them miserable, both here and hereafter. He instructs them in that knowledge which is useful and profitable, that will give them a right understanding of their duty to their Creator, to their neighbour, and to themselves, and make them wise unto salvation : and with the blessing of God co-operating with these endeavours, what comfortable hopes may not such a parent entertain of reaping the happy fruits of all his labours ? Instead of looking upon his offspring with shame and grief and having his grey hairs, by their means, brought down with sorrow to the grave ; may he not reasonably expect to behold them with an honest pride, with the most heart-felt delight ; and to see them as so many “ olive-branches round about ‘ his table,” fruitful in every good work, and increasing in the knowledge and love of God ?

There is no person, I believe, but will allow, that this is the most likely means a man can use to make his children a blessing both to himself and the community ; and though it

should prove ineffectual, (for success is not in our own power) yet of this he may be assured, that his pious and sincere endeavours to train them up in a sober, honest and religious course of life, will certainly recommend him to the favour of the Almighty ; as is manifest from the great regard which God expressed for *Abraham* on this very account. “ And the Lord said, shall I hide
‘ from Abraham that thing which I do ;
‘ seeing that Abraham shall surely become
‘ a great and mighty nation, and all the nations of the earth shall be blessed in him ?
‘ For I know him, that he will command his
‘ children and his household after him, and
‘ they shall keep the way of the Lord, to do
‘ justice and judgment ; that the Lord may
‘ bring upon Abraham that which he hath
‘ spoken of him.”

This alone, I should think a sufficient encouragement to parents, to be very careful in the education of their children ; as they are thereby making provision for their own happiness, at the same time they are endeavouring to secure that of their offspring. They are laying a good foundation of comfort

against a day of trouble, if such should ever come upon them ; I mean, if unhappily, and notwithstanding all their endeavours to make them otherwise, they should live to see their children wicked and miserable. Such parents will then have the comfort of considering, that they are clear of the guilt of their children's sins ; nor will those bitter reflections obtrude themselves upon their minds, which must haunt the man, who sees his offspring ruined by those follies or vices, which his example had taught, or his carelessness and neglect suffered them to fall into. Bitter indeed, must be the reflections of such a parent ; of him who is conscious that he hath not only his own, but the sins of his children to account for ; of him who applies to himself, (as he justly may,) those dreadful words, which God spake to the prophet *Ezekiel* : “ When I say unto the wicked
‘ thou shalt surely die, and thou givest him
‘ not warning, nor speakest to warn the
‘ wicked from his wicked way, to save his
‘ life ; the same wicked man shall die in his
‘ iniquity ; but his blood will I require at thy
‘ hands ! ”

I have now considered some of the duties required of us by the christian religion, and have endeavoured to shew how much more conducive even to our *temporal* happiness, is a life of virtue and piety, than that of vice and irreligion. And here I cannot but take notice of the wonderful love of God to mankind, who in order to encourage our obedience to his laws, has annexed a present as well as future reward to a good life, and has so interwoven our duty and happiness, that while we are discharging our obligations to the one, we are at the same time making provision for the other.

How much then do they derogate from the honour of God, and injure the cause of truth, who represent religion as an unprofitable and unpleasant task ! when it is plain to any man, who is not blinded by his passions, but considers the matter with an unprejudiced mind, that the great design of religion is to make us happy here, as well as hereafter ; that all its rules and precepts are most admirably suited to this end ; and that, would men be persuaded to live in the practice of them, this world would be a kind of heaven upon earth !

Had the performance of our duty been ever so irksome and difficult, and had nothing but trouble and misery been the lot of good men in the present world; yet even then, when it is considered that this life will shortly have an end, and that there is an “eternal weight of glory” reserved in heaven for those who truly love and serve God; what wise man would not prefer the rugged paths of virtue and religion, which he knows will shortly lead him to an eternity of happiness, to the ways of folly and wickedness (supposing them to be ever so pleasant,) which, he is sure, will in a little time, bring him into a place of endless misery?

But since there is nothing in religion, but what tends to make our lives easy, cheerful and contented; nothing but what is suitable to our natures, and agreeable to the dictates of right reason; nothing but what will enoble our minds, enlarge our understandings, and inspire us with a generous principle of universal love, and charity and good will to mankind; in short, since “the commands of God are not grievous,” but his “yoke easy, and his burthen light;” it ma-

nifestly follows, that, as a virtuous and pious life is the highest wisdom, so a vicious and irreligious one, is the extremity of folly and madness.

A P R A Y E R.

O MOST gracious God, who, out of thy great love and tender regard for mankind, hath set before us life and death, everlasting happiness and misery ; and hath endued us with a freedom of will, and a liberty to choose the one, and avoid the other ; and to encourage us to make a right choice, hath annexed a present as well as future reward to our obedience to thy laws, and made the ways of religion ways of pleasantness, and all its paths to be peace : O give me wisdom, that I may not be carried away by the deceitful pleasures of this world, but may understand and choose the things which belong to my

peace, and wherein my true and only happiness consists.

Convince me more and more, that sin is the greatest of all evils ; that guilt and misery are always inseparable ; and that there is no solid and substantial happiness to be attained in this life, but that which results from the testimony of a good conscience, and the hope of thy favour and acceptance ; and grant that these momentous truths may be so deeply impressed upon my mind, that I may make it the sincere endeavour of my whole life to please and obey thee, who art my sovereign good and happiness ; the only sure foundation of all my hopes both here and hereafter ; and in comparison of whose favour, all the honours, riches and enjoyments of this world are as nothing.

Deliver me, I beseech thee, from the shame and anguish, the horror and confusion of a guilty conscience ; and give me that comfort and complacency of mind, which arises from the consciousness of having been faithful in thy service, and obedient to thy will. And since thou hath been graciously pleased to make thy service the

most perfect freedom, and the practice of our duty conducive as well to our present as to our future well being ; O ! establish thy laws in my heart, and guide me in the ways of thy commandments ; that having faithfully served thee in this life, I may at last be made a joyful partaker of that which is to come, through the sole merits and intercession of our eternal Advocate and Mediator, Jesus Christ. Amen.

C H A P. II.

IN the preceding chapter I have endeavoured to shew, that religion is the only solid foundation of happiness in this world; the only means by which we can be enabled to proceed in our journey through life, with any tolerable degree of ease and comfort : I shall, in the next place, consider the advantage of religion in respect to the prospect it affords us when we come to die.

And this is an advantage peculiar to virtue and religion, and to which a life of folly and wickedness cannot pretend. The most which *that* promises its votaries, is to regale their senses for a little while : it gives them no hopes beyond the grave, nor aims at any thing farther than a short-lived happiness. “ When a wicked man dieth, his expectation shall perish.” All his enjoyments are then at an end ; and those schemes upon which he had built his happiness, vanish forever. But with a good man it is far otherwise. He looks beyond the present life, and beholds with an eye of faith the heavenly “ Jerusalem, the city of the li-

‘ving God!’ that place of endless bliss and happiness, which God hath prepared for them that love him. In the hope and expectation of this happiness, he considers himself “as a pilgrim and stranger upon ‘earth,” and through the assistance of God’s Holy Spirit, is daily endeavouring, by a life of virtue and piety, to render himself worthy to become an inhabitant of those heavenly regions ;—to fit himself for the society of just men made perfect.

It must indeed be owned, that death is truly the king of terrors ; that the disunion of soul and body ; a separation from all those objects which have so long been dear to us, are reflections in the highest degree awful and distressing : Yet to the good man, there are considerations which enable him to meet this formidable tyrant, not only without alarm, but with smiles, and to welcome him as the messenger of joy. He considers, that to leave this world is only to quit a place of trouble and vexation, of vanity and emptiness : That it is to leave a “barren and dry ‘wilderness, where no water is,” for the delightful regions of bliss and happiness, where

are rivers of pleasure, and a never-ceasing spring of endless comfort, commensurate with the utmost desires of the soul. He considers, that “ though this earthly tabernacle
‘ is dissolved, yet he has a building of God,
‘ a house not made with hands, eternal in
‘ the heavens :” And is assured with *Job*,
“ that his Redeemer liveth, and that he
‘ shall stand at the latter day upon the earth ;
‘ and though this body be destroyed, yet in
‘ his flesh shall he see God, whom he shall
‘ see for himself, and his eyes shall behold,
‘ and not another’s.”

This is what religion promises to them,
“ who, by patient continuance in well-
‘ doing, seek for glory and honour and im-
‘ mortality.” It is the hope and expectation of this unspeakable happiness which fortify the mind of a good christian, and give him a courage and resolution, that even death itself shall not be able to shake

It was this that gave holy *David* such a firmness of mind as made him say, “ though
‘ I walk through the valley of the shadow of
‘ death, I will fear no evil ; for thou art

‘with me, thy rod, and thy staff comfort
 ‘me.” He had made God his portion, his
 hope and his trust: “The Lord,” says he, “is
 ‘my rock, and my defence ; my Saviour,
 ‘my God, and my might, in whom I will
 ‘trust ; my buckler, the horn also of my
 ‘salvation.” And though we find him some-
 times complaining, “that the sorrows of
 ‘death had compassed him, and the over-
 ‘flowings of ungodliness made him afraid ;
 ‘that the pains of hell came about him, and
 the snares of death overtook him ;” yet the
 great confidence he had in the goodness and
 love of God, and the firm belief of a better
 life after this, overcame all his fears. “I had
 fainted,” says he, “but that I verily believe
 ‘to see the goodness of the Lord in the land
 ‘of the living.”

Religion has been the support of good
 men in all ages. It is certain, whoever
 leans upon any thing else, will find that he
 trusts to a broken reed, which will bend un-
 der him. ^b There is nothing, (as I have

- (b) Lean not on earth ; 'twill pierce thee to the heart ;
 A broken reed, at best ; but oft, a spear ;
 On its sharp point peace bleeds, and hope expires.

DR. YOUNG.

observed in the preceding chapter) but the testimony of a good conscience, a dependence on God, and a reliance on his promises, that is able to bear us up under the pressure of any great calamity; much less will any thing else, afford us consolation at the hour of death. For as we shall then be strip't of all our possessions, and must bid a final adieu to all the enjoyments of this world; unless we are fortified "with the shield of faith, and the breast-plate of righteousness; unless we have "put on the Lord Jesus," and are clothed with the robes of his righteousness, we shall be left to encounter death with all its terrors, naked and defenceless. The sinner, how much soever he may now "trust in the multitude of his riches, and strengthen himself in his wickedness," must then give up every dependence, and descend into the regions of darkness, not only without hope, but with the most dreadful expectations. Of what infinite moment is it then to us all, so to live, that "when the time appointed for our great change shall come," we may meet death without fear or alarm; and with

an humble confidence, may look up to God in an assured hope of his mercy in Christ Jesus !

A good life is the sure pledge of a happy death. As it fills our minds with a joy and satisfaction while we live, far surpassing all the pleasures of sensual gratification ; so, when we come to die, it gives us that " peace of God which passeth all understanding." When a man in his last hour can look back upon a life well spent, and can say with king *Hezekiah*, " remember now, O Lord, I beseech thee, how I have walked before thee in truth and with a perfect heart, and have done that which is good in thy sight ;" what an unspeakable satisfaction must it be to him ! How mild and calm will death then appear, and with how little concern will he receive its summons ! With what cheerfulness will he then take leave of this world, and all that was dear to him in it ; and how contentedly will he quit his earthly tabernacle, in the assurance that he is going to a better place ; to a world where he will enjoy an eternity of existence with celestial spirits, in those re-

gions of bliss where is fulness of joy for evermore ! What an unspeakable comfort I say, must it be to a dying man, when he is entering into the “ valley of the shadow of death,” to have before him a bright prospect of life and glory ; to find the light of God’s countenance shining upon his mind, and the comforts of his Holy Spirit cheering and refreshing his soul ; to be able to look up to God with a filial confidence, and with a “ hope full of glory and immortality,” to resign his soul into the hands of his Maker ; not doubting but his heavenly Father, whom he has faithfully served in this world, will take care of and reward him in the next ; and that the same infinite power and goodness, which has carried him safe through this “ vale of tears and misery,” will conduct him in his passage to a blessed eternity ! How happy must be the last moments of those, who quit the world under such an assurance ! These are the persons who may feelingly exclaim “ O ! death, where is thy sting ? O ! grave where is thy victory ? ”

But what must be the condition of the wicked at that awful period? Of him who is under the terrors of death, and a guilty conscience? The distress, the agony of mind, which such a person must experience, words cannot express; and in comparison therewith, the most exquisite torments of the body are as nothing! "The spirit of a man," says *Solomon*, "will sustain his infirmity; but a wounded spirit who can bear?" With what shame and confusion does he then look back upon the actions of his past life? How does he tremble and is confounded at the recollection of those sins, which were once the darling objects of his guilty desires; and when he considers, that he is entering upon that unchangeable state, from which there is no redemption; that he is going to give an account of a life, which he cannot think on without horror and amazement! What a sickness of the heart must the reflection occasion! With what inexpressible dread must his mind be overwhelmed!

- (c) In that dread moment, how the frantic soul
Raves round the wall of her clay tenement;
Runs to each avenue, and shrieks for help;

How does he condemn himself, when he considers that he has spent that time either insignificantly or wickedly, which was given him for noble and excellent purposes ; that he has neglected the great and important work of his salvation, and been deaf to all the calls and invitations of God's Holy Spirit ; that instead of laying up in store a good foundation of hope and comfort against the day of trouble, which is now come upon him, he has heaped up to himself a dreadful load of guilt, which is ready to sink him with its intolerable weight !

O wretched man, what wouldst thou give (were it in thy power,) to recall those pre-

But shrieks in vain ! How wishfully she looks
On all she's leaving, now no longer her's !
A little longer, yet a little longer,
O ! might she stay to wash away her crimes,
And sit her for her passage ! Mournful sight !
Her very eyes weep blood ; and every groan
She heaves is big with horror : But the foe,
Like a staunch murderer, steady to his purpose,
Pursues her close thro' ev'ry lane of life,
Nor misses once the track ; but presses on :
Till forc'd at last to the tremendous verge,
At once she sinks. —————

“ THE GRAVE ” by BLAIR.

cious moments, which thou hath devoted to folly and vice ! How doth thou wish, that thou “hadst known in time the things that ‘belong to thy peace ! But alas ! “they are ‘now hid from thine eyes,” and nothing is left but darknefs and despair.

But let us suppose the life of a dying man not to have been so flagrantly vicious, as to fill his mind with thoughts so dreadfully alarming as these : Yet, if upon the review of that life in his last hour, he finds in it such a mixture of good and evil, that he is in great doubt concerning his eternal welfare, how sad and disconsolate must his condition be even then ! And what a distressing state of doubt and anxiety will he labour under, when he considers that he is leaving this world, and going he knows not whither ; that he is just launching into the boundless ocean of eternity, and knows not but the moment he does so, he may sink into the terrible abyfs of endless misery ? It is, without all question, a most uncomfortable thing to be doubtful of a matter, of which it so nearly concerns us to have some reasonable assurance.

O! that men would be persuaded seriously to think on these things; that they would "be wise and consider their latter end;" and, as the *Psalmist* advises, would "keep innocency, and take heed to the thing that is right; for that," and that only, "shall bring a man peace at the last." And who is there so stupid, that would not wish for so invaluable a blessing? What wise man would not submit to the worst that could befall him during the short period of his existence in this life, rather than run the least risque of going out of the world under the terrors of a guilty conscience? It is (whatever those, who are under the dominion of their passions, may think to the contrary,) it is the utmost wisdom of man to prepare for his latter end, by conducting himself according to the will of his Creator: For it is certain, however some may flatter themselves to the contrary, there is no leaving this world, with any tolerable composure, unless our lives have been such, as through the tender mercies of God, and the merits of Christ Jesus, we may reasonably hope that we are in the number of those, whom our

great Judge shall at the last day pronounce *blessed*. But this is only the portion of the righteous : For how can any one, whose life has been a direct contradiction to the declared will of God, entertain any reasonable hopes of his favour? Though he should, perhaps, when he sees death approaching, lament the folly of his past life, and “ with ‘ strong crying and tears,” resolve upon a new course of life, if it should please God to spare him; yet since the gospel hath nowhere assured us, that God will accept of a death-bed repentance, or be reconciled to a sinner, who, after he hath lived a wicked and careless life, and been deaf to all the calls and invitations of the Holy Spirit, the threatenings of the gospel, and the checks of his own conscience, shall at the last, when he is able no longer to gratify his passions, and begins to fear the fatal consequence of his sins, cry out for mercy, and wish that he had been wise in time; I say, since God has nowhere revealed, that he will accept of any repentance which is not followed by a thorough change and amendment of life, and a sincere obedience to his

commandments ; and since it is impossible for a dying sinner to bring forth such fruits of repentance ; how unsatisfactory must be the hopes that are built upon so uncertain a foundation !

'Tis true, to repent is all that a man, who has led a wicked life, can do when he comes to die ; and rather than go out of the world hardened and insensible, it would be better for his own sake, and for that of his friends and relations, if he would do this much ; (for who knows how far infinite mercy may be extended ?) But surely, it must be allowed to be the greatest instance of folly and madness, to venture a matter of such infinite moment upon so uncertain an issue ; to leave that weighty concern, an attention to which ought to have been the chief business of his life, to those moments of weakness and alarm, when the body is sinking under pain and disease, and the terrified soul fluttering on the brink of eternity : and should not the repentance of such persons be a true godly sorrow, “ a repentance to salvation ‘not to be repented of,’ ” (and whether it

would be such or not, no man can say) they are in that case forever lost and undone.

But suppose we could be assured, that a death-bed repentance would be effectual ; yet who can tell, whether a man may have time for that work in the hour of death ? Or if he could be certain, that a lingering sickness would put an end to his days, yet how does he know that God will then vouchsafe him the grace of repentance ! and without that grace, it is impossible he should repent. How much rather may such an one fear, lest God should be so offended by his many wilful refusals to hearken to the admonitions of the Holy Spirit, as to cut short his day of grace, and deliver him over to a hardened and reprobate mind !

The scripture assures us there is a time when men shall call upon God, and he will not hearken. “ Because I have called, and
‘ ye refused ; I have stretched out my hand,
‘ and no man regarded : But ye have set
‘ at nought all my counsel, and would none
‘ of my reproof : I also will laugh at your calamity. I will mock when your fear com-

‘eth ; when your fear cometh as desolation ;
‘and your destruction cometh as a whirl-
‘wind ; when distress and anguish cometh
‘upon you. Then shall they call upon me,
‘but I will not answer ; they shall seek me
‘early, but they shall not find me : For that
‘they hated knowledge, and did not chuse
‘the fear of the Lord ; they would none of
‘my counsel. They despised all my reproof ;
‘therefore shall they eat of the fruit of their
‘own way, and be filled with their own
devices.” The end of the long suffering
and forbearance of God, is “to lead men
‘to repentance :” but if, instead of produc-
ing that happy effect, it only hardens them
in their sins, and determines them on a
continuance in their wickedness, vainly
presuming they shall repent, when they come
to die ; is there not reason to fear that God
will leave them at their last hour under the
terrors and agonies of a fearful death : that
he will “laugh at their calamity, and mock
‘when their fear cometh.”

“O ! consider this, all ye that forget
‘God, lest he pluck you away, and there be
‘none to deliver you : consider it in due

time, before it is too late, before the dreadful hour arrives, which will deprive you of all opportunity of reconciling yourselves to your offended God, and when the door of hope will be forever shut. Lay aside your passions for a little while, and listen to the still voice of reason, the declarations of God's holy word, the admonitions of his blessed Spirit, and the checks of your own conscience. Be persuaded to set about the great work of your salvation "to-day, while it is 'called to-day, before the night cometh 'when no man can work.'" Remember that though you are now, perhaps, in health and vigour, possessed of every thing that can gratify the senses, and make life desirable; yet the time is coming, and whether you think of it or not will hasten on apace, when you must take your leave of every earthly enjoyment; when nothing will appear of any value, but a good conscience: neither honours, power, riches, nor any thing else will then be able to give you one moment's ease, or afford you one comfortable thought. Nothing will then be regarded but the consciousness of having in some

measure answered the end for which God sent you into the world ; nothing but having lived in the fear and love of God “ and
‘ in simplicity and godly sincerity had your
‘ conversation in this world.”

It was this that made *St. Paul* desire “ to
‘ be dissolved, and to be with Christ ;” for he had “ fought a good fight, and finished
‘ his course, and kept the faith.” And therefore he could say with great assurance, when the time of his departure was at hand, that “ there was laid up for him a crown of
‘ righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, should give him at that day.” And this it was that made a late pious divine^d of our church, when near his death, utter these remarkable expressions. “ I am entering upon my last labour ; the Lord gave, and he is now taking away, blessed be the name of the Lord : For I thank my God, I am going without any distrust, without the least mis-giving, to a place of rest, and joy, and everlasting bliss. There is no

(d) Mr. KETTLEWELL ; see the preface to his five discourses published since his death.

life like a happy death. I have endeavoured, even from my youth, to approve myself a faithful servant to my great master. I have taken some pains in writing several books ; I have seriously considered them, and am fully satisfied (looking on those about him) that you may find in them the way to heaven. The christian duties contained therein have been my practice, as well as study, and I now find the advantage of it. And therefore be careful to read them often and seriously, and live suitably thereunto, that when you come to the condition I am now in, you may die with comfort, as you see me do. I have some little pain indeed ; but my pain is nothing so extraordinary as my hopes : for I have earnestly repented of all my sins, and verily believe, that through the tender mercies of my God, and the merits of my blessed Saviour Jesus Christ, I shall be carried up into *Abraham's* bosom." After which, it is said, he made this short prayer : " I wait, O God, for that everlasting rest, which I want at present, but shall not long. I am ready, when thou, my God, callest for me ; yet can stay with

patience till thou pleasest : for thy time is the best time, and thy pleasure the best pleasure."

See here the end of a good man : how calm, how serene and comfortable is his death ! Who would not wish " to die the death of the righteous, and that his last end may be like his ?" Is there any thing like this in the case of a wicked man, in the hour of his dissolution ? Alas no ; if you behold such an one in his last extremity, (unless indeed he is lost to all sense of his deplorable situation, and dies hardened and impenitent) you will hear little else but bitter reflections on himself for the folly and madness of his past life ; and these ending in sighs and groans, dreadful to himself, and terrible to all about him. May God, of his infinite mercy, keep every one from such a dreadful hour ; and " teach us all so to number our days, that we may apply our hearts unto true wisdom !" That wisdom which will make us wise unto salvation, and fill our minds with comfort and satisfaction while we live ; and, which is of infinitely more value, give us, when we come to die,

“ that peace of God which passeth all understanding,” through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

A P R A Y E R.

O Most great and mighty God, in whose hands are the issues of life and death ! Thou orderest all things by thy infinite power and wisdom, and hast appointed for all men once to die, and, after this short life is ended, hast of thy infinite goodness provided for thy faithful servants, a state of endless bliss and happiness. O ! make me truly sensible of the uncertainty of my life, and teach me so to number my days, that I may apply my heart unto true wisdom ! Let not death surprize me unawares, but grant that I may live in such a constant and habitual preparation for my latter end, that however suddenly thou shalt be pleased to take me out

of this world, I may be found prepared for that great account, which I must one day give before the judgment-seat of Christ. Enable me by the assistance of thy Holy Spirit, to finish the great work of my salvation before the night comes, when no man can work, and to lay up a good foundation of hope and comfort against the hour of death ; that, when the time of my departure shall arrive, I may look back with satisfaction upon a life well-spent, and may meet death without fear, and with a perfect resignation to thy will.

Look upon me, O most gracious God, when the time of my dissolution draws nigh, as a reconciled Father in Christ Jesus ; speak peace unto my conscience, and say unto my soul, I am the God of thy salvation ! give thy holy angels charge over me and let the comforts of thy Holy Spirit cheer and refresh my soul, in its passage through this vale of tears and misery, to a happy eternity.

O Lord ! leave me not to myself in that time of distress, when I shall stand in so

much need of thee ! Suffer me not at my last hour, through any pains of body or weakness of mind, to renounce my dependence upon thee : but grant, O merciful Father, that with an humble reliance on thy mercies, and the infinite merits of my dear Redeemer, I may cheerfully resign up my soul into thy hands, and may be willing, and even desirous, to leave this world, when thou my God shall please to call me hence.

O Lord ! suffer not my soul to be ever separated from thee, its proper happiness ; but grant, that after a life devoted to thy service, I may dwell with thee in those mansions of eternal bliss and glory, which thou hast prepared for those who truly love and fear thee ; through the merits, and for the sake of thy beloved Son, Jesus Christ, our Lord and only Saviour ! Amen.

C H A P. III.

HITHERTO I have considered the importance of religion, as it respects only our well-being in this world, and our going comfortably out of it. But as there are advantages resulting from a good life, infinitely greater than these ; namely, that it will entitle us, through the merits of Christ Jesus, “ to an inheritance incorruptible, and ‘ undefiled, and that fadeth not away ;” I shall endeavour to shew, in the last place, that a serious and conscientious observance of the duties of religion, will most certainly be rewarded with eternal happiness in the life which is to come.

Of the nature of that happiness, “ of that ‘ exceeding weight of glory,” which God hath reserved for those who put their trust in him, I shall not presume to speak. We are indeed, assured in the holy scriptures, that such persons shall dwell for ever in the presence of God, and of our blessed Redeemer, Jesus Christ, in the fulness of joy ; and that in those heavenly regions they

shall converse with saints and angels, and the spirits of just men made perfect, to all eternity : but the truth is, that these are matters so much above our imperfect conceptions, that, with our present faculties, it is impossible we can fully comprehend them. Of this, however, we are assured, that the things which God hath prepared for them that love him, are such “ as neither eye hath seen nor ear heard, neither hath it entered into the heart of man to conceive.” And as this is as much as, at present, it is necessary for us to know, all curious inquiries into the nature of the happiness of the next life, will be but of little use to us : what more immediately concerns us to consider is, that our sincere obedience to God’s commandments, will certainly be rewarded with eternal life and happiness. Of this, indeed, it is a matter of great importance to us to be well assured ; that we may not be weary of well-doing, but “ may run with patience the race that is set before us, and press towards the mark for the prize of the high-calling of God in Christ Jesus.”

Some men, indeed, would wish us to be

lieve, that the whole duration of our being is confined to the present world; and that death puts a final period to our existence. •

That there are persons who would thus sink human nature to the level of brutes, is really a melancholy consideration, and may, for a moment, occasion some surprize : But upon inquiry, I believe, we shall always find, that these men first live as if there was no God, and then endeavour to persuade themselves and others, that there really is none : so that, instead of regulating their practice by their faith, they most preposterously suit their faith to their practice. I shall not concern myself at present with these men; it is to those, who believe in the christian religion, and the revelation of God's will in the holy scriptures, that I now principally

- (e) Shall man be left abandon'd in the dust,
 When fate, relenting, let's the flow'r revive ?
 Shall nature's voice, to man alone unjust,
 Bid him, tho' doom'd to perish, hope to live ?
 Is it for this fair virtue oft must strive
 With disappointment, penury and pain ?
 No ;—Heaven's immortal spring shall yet revive ;
 And man's majestic beauty bloom again.

BEATTIE.

address myself; and with such there can surely be no doubt, but that in those sacred writings "we have eternal life;" and that the performance of God's commandments, is the certain condition of obtaining it.

Natural religion indeed will teach us, not only that "God is, but that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him." But it has pleased God, of his great goodness, not to leave us to the light of nature alone, to find out this weighty truth. The rewards of another life are so fully and clearly revealed in the writings of our Saviour and his apostles; and the means by which we may obtain them is there so plainly laid down, that no room is left for any doubt about the matter. Whatever obscure ideas the Jews, as well as Gentiles, had of a future state, it is certain "that life and immortality is now brought to light by the gospel:" and we may rest assured, that though when we die, our bodies will be laid in the dreary chambers of the grave, and there become the food of worms, and moulder into dust, yet it will not be long "'ere this corruptible shall put on incorruption, and this

‘ mortal shall put on immortality. For God
‘ hath appointed a day, in the which he will
‘ judge the world in righteousness, by that
‘ man whom he hath ordained ; whereof
‘ he hath given assurance unto all men, in
‘ that he hath raised him from the dead :”
A day “ wherein we must all appear before
‘ the judgment-seat of Christ, that every one
‘ may receive the things done in his body,
‘ according to that he hath done, whether
‘ it be good or bad. And then all that are
‘ in their graves shall hear his voice, and shall
‘ come forth ; they that have done good,
‘ unto the resurrection of life, and they that
‘ have done evil, unto the resurrection of
‘ damnation,”

Whoever, then, believes the gospel, cannot doubt of these two great articles of the christian religion, “ the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting.” The possibility of the former has been made evident, by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead ; and the certainty of the latter, appears from the express declarations of God in the holy scriptures. Indeed the whole tenor of the christian religion sufficiently proves it ;

every précept of which tends to purify and refine our natures, and to prepare us for the society of a higher order of beings in another life. The *Apostle* assures us, that “ God hath not appointed us to wrath, but
‘ to obtain salvation by our Lord Jesus
‘ Christ, who died for us, that we should
‘ live together with him.” And St. *John* tells us, that “ God so loved the world, that
‘ he gave his only begotten Son, to the end
‘ that all that believe in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.”

If then we believe that God is infinitely just and true, we cannot doubt but that, at the great day of retribution, “ he will render
‘ to every man according to his deeds. To
‘ them who by patient continuance in well-
‘ doing, seek for glory and honour and immortality,” He, who is truth itself and cannot deceive, hath promised that he will give “ eternal life ; but to them who are
‘ contentious, and do not obey the truth,
‘ but obey unrighteousness,” he hath declared that he will pour forth “ indignation
‘ and wrath, tribulation and anguish, upon

‘ every soul of man that doth evil, of the
‘ Jew first, and also of the Gentile.”

Our Saviour, in his exposition of the parable of the *Tares*, tells us, that “at the
‘ end of the world, the Son of Man shall
‘ send forth his angels, and they shall gather
‘ out of his kingdom all things that offend,
‘ and them which do iniquity, and shall cast
‘ them into a furnace of fire ; there shall be
‘ wailing and gnashing of teeth.” And so
in his exposition of the parable of the *Net*
in the same chapter, he says that at “the
‘ end of the world, the angels shall come
‘ forth, and sever the wicked from among
‘ the just ; and shall cast them into the fur-
‘ nace of fire ; there shall be wailing and
‘ gnashing of teeth.” Thus again we are
told by our Saviour, that “when the Son of
‘ Man shall come in his glory, and all the
‘ holy angels with him, then shall he sit upon
‘ the throne of his glory, and before him
‘ shall be gathered all nations, and he shall
‘ separate them one from another, as a
‘ shepherd divideth his sheep from the goats :
‘ and he shall set the sheep on his right

‘hand, but the goats on the left. Then
‘shall he say unto them on his right hand ;
‘come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the
‘kingdom prepared for you from the begin-
‘ning of the world : But to them on the left
‘hand ; depart from me, ye cursed, into
‘everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and
‘his angels. And these shall go away into
‘everlasting punishment, but the righteous
‘into life eternal.”

This, as it is a plain but lively description of the awful solemnity of that tremendous day, “when the Son of Man shall
‘come in the glory of his Father, with his
‘angels, to judge the quick and the dead ;”
so it is sufficient to convince us, that
though “without holiness no man shall see
‘the Lord,” yet that every one who believes
the gospel, and sincerely obeys the precepts
of it, shall most assuredly “enter into the
‘kingdom of heaven.” This was the very
purchase of Christ’s blood, and the end for
which he was contented to be given up into
the hands of cruel men, to be buffeted, spit
upon, and ill-treated, and at last to suffer a
cruel and ignominious death upon the cross.

“ He gave himself for us, that he might
‘ redeem us from all iniquity and become
‘ the author of eternal salvation to all them
‘ that obey him. Though he was rich, yet
‘ for our sakes he became poor, that we
‘ through his poverty might be made rich.
‘ He was wounded for our transgressions,
‘ he was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement of our peace was upon him, and
‘ with his stripes we are healed.”

-The redemption of mankind was thought a design worthy the Son of God: An object so important in his sight was the salvation of the souls of men, that to accomplish it he esteemed no sufferings too great: For this it was that he condescended to take our nature upon him; to lay in darkness, and in the shadow of death, that he might make us the children of God, and exalt us to everlasting life: So that, though we “ were sometimes afar off, yet
‘ being now made nigh by the blood of
‘ Christ, we are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellow-citizens with the
‘ saints, and of the household of God.” And if we are careful to perform our part of the

covenant, we may assuredly say with St. *Paul*, that “henceforth there is laid up for us a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give us at that day.” For we have the promise of Him, who is *Truth* itself, and cannot deceive, that if we are “faithful unto death, he will give us a crown of life.”

And what a glorious incitement is this to mankind to live virtuously and piously in the present world! What can we desire more to make us “steadfast and unmovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord,” than to know “that our labour shall not be in vain.” That every good action of our lives will be registered in heaven, and there meet with its reward: That the least of them will not pass unnoticed; but that every virtue and christian grace, and every degree of them, “shall receive their just recompence at the resurrection of the just.” “O blessed time, when mortality shall be swallowed up of life; and death and sorrow shall be no more! When we shall be eased of all our pains, and resolved of all our doubts; when we shall be

cleansed from all our sins, freed from all our fears, and be happy beyond our hopes; and when all this happiness will be secured to us beyond the power of time and change!" f

As the consideration of these things cannot but at present fill our hearts "with joy 'unspeakable,' and excite us continually "to give thanks unto the Father, which 'hath made us meet to be partakers of the 'inheritance of the saints in light; who 'hath delivered us from the power of darkness, and translated us into the kingdom 'of his dear Son:" So, when we come to have a nearer and more immediate view of the glories of that kingdom which God hath prepared for us, what joy, unspeakable, will it communicate to our souls! How will it transport us to see him, whom we loved and faithfully served, not arraigned as a malefactor, nor hanging disgracefully upon the cross, but to view him in all his glory, sitting triumphantly upon his throne, adored by angels and arch-angels; "thousand thousands ministering unto him, and ten thou-

(f) Archbishop Tillotson.

‘ stand times ten thousand standing before
‘ him !” To see him, not as an angry and
incensed judge, but as a merciful Saviour
and Redeemer, and to receive that affec-
tionate invitation, “ Come, ye blessed of my
‘ Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for
‘ you from the foundation of the world !

But, on the other hand, what will be the
situation of the wicked and impenitent, at
that awful day of retribution ! When the
“ Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven,
‘ with his mighty angels, in flaming fire,
‘ taking vengeance on them that know not
‘ God, and obey not the gospel of our Lord
‘ Jesus Christ ?” When they shall see the
“ heavens passing away with a great noise,
‘ and the elements melting with fervent
‘ heat ; the earth also, and the works that
‘ are therein, burnt up !” When they shall
hear pronounced those dreadful words, that
irrevocable sentence which is to fix their
eternal doom, “ Depart from me, ye cur-
‘ fed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the
‘ devil and his angels ! How will they “ call
‘ upon the mountains and rocks to fall on
‘ them, and to hide them from the face of

‘ him that sitteth on the throne, and from
 ‘ the wrath of the Lamb !”—But alas! what
 will that avail them, when “the great day
 ‘ of his wrath is come !” If he who once died
 to purchase their salvation, will not save
 them, to whom shall they flee for succour?
 If they are condemned by the Saviour of
 the world, who shall intercede in their be-
 half? It will then be too late to cry for
 mercy, to lament their folly and madness;
 all prayers and entreaties, all tears and re-
 pentance, will then be in vain. “He that is
 ‘ unjust, may be unjust still, and he that is
 ‘ filthy, may be filthy still. As the tree is
 ‘ fallen, so it must lie” for ever. The time
 of trial is over, the day of grace is ended,
 “and there remains no more sacrifice for
 ‘ sin.” The dreadful period is arrived when
 they must be banished for ever from the
 presence of God, and be eternally doomed
 to those regions of despair “where the
 ‘ worm dieth not, and the fire is not
 ‘ quenched !” 8

(g) Regions of sorrow † doleful shades where peace
 And rest can never dwell † hope never comes,
 That comes to all : but torture without end

This is a state so truly serious, so tremendously awful, that to contemplate it without resolving in a good earnest to flee from "the wrath to come," would seem scarcely possible. Nay, the bare possibility of experiencing such a situation, ought surely to determine every reasonable man "to have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness," but to devote himself to the service of that God "who is of purer eyes than to behold iniquity, with whom are the issues of life and death," and who hath promised to reward every man according to his works. Would mankind consider these things; would they try the comparative weight of *Time* and *Eternity*, by balancing them against each other in the scale of reason; would they reflect that the life of man can endure, at the most, but a few years, and that, for aught they know, the present hour may be their last; that every

Still urges, and a fiery deluge, fed
With ever-burning sulphur unconsum'd !
Such place eternal justice hath prepar'd
For those rebellious.

MILTON.

moment brings them one step nearer to eternity—to that unchangeable state in which they will for ever be happy or miserable : Would mankind, I say, give a respite to their labouring minds, and call off their anxious thoughts from the eager pursuits of business and pleasure ; would they lay aside their prejudices and passions, retire within themselves, and listen to the still small voice of reason, the suggestions of God's Holy Spirit, and the whisperings of their own conscience ; and thus prepared, would they meditate on those important truths with that seriousness which they so well deserve, the most happy effects would be the consequence : It would enable them to form a correct estimate of the present life, by extending their views beyond the bounds of this vale of misery : It would inform them wherein the true dignity of man consists ; instruct them in the real business of life, and point out the proper objects of pursuit : It would, in short, tend to make them live comfortably, die peaceably, and, above all, make them “ wise unto salvation.”

O ! let me intreat every one, with that

earnestness which a matter of such infinite importance demands, seriously to inquire of himself whether he is in the path which leads to everlasting happiness ; whether he is prepared to render that great account, which will one day most assuredly be required of him. But more particularly let me intreat those who are deeply immersed in sensuality and wickedness, to pause in their fatal career—to reflect for a moment whether they are hastening ! Let me conjure them, if they have any regard for their immortal souls, to consider without delay, the things which belong unto their peace ; to forsake their evil ways, “ and turn unto the Lord their God, who is gracious and merciful, slow to anger and of great kindness ; ” “ for I have no pleasure in the death of him that dieth, saith the Lord God ; wherefore turn yourselves and live.”

As for those happy christians, who have entered upon a good life, and are engaged in the practice of virtue and religion ; who make the glory of God, and the salvation of their own souls and the souls of others, their great care and concern, it is only ne-

cessary to exhort them to proceed in their christian course with courage and resolution; "to hold fast their profession," and with an unwearied diligence "to press towards ' their mark, for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus ;" not doubting, but " that he that hath begun a good ' work in them, will perform it until the day ' of Jesus Christ." They have the promise of God ; of that Being who is infinitely just and true, that he will remember and reward " their works of faith, and labour of love, ' and patience of hope in our Lord Jesus ' Christ ;" and that " in due season they ' shall reap if they faint not."—" Be thou ' faithful unto death," saith he " and I will ' give thee a crown of life."


O happy, happy time for those blessed souls, " who have fought the good fight, ' and kept the faith!" All their labours will then be at an end ; they will then be admitted to " an inheritance incorruptible, ' undefiled, and that fadeth not away ;" and be received into that place, " where there ' shall be no more death, neither sorrow ' nor crying, neither shall there be any more

‘pain;’ for “in thy presence,” O God,
“is fulness of joy; at thy right hand are
‘pleasures for evermore!’” Amen.

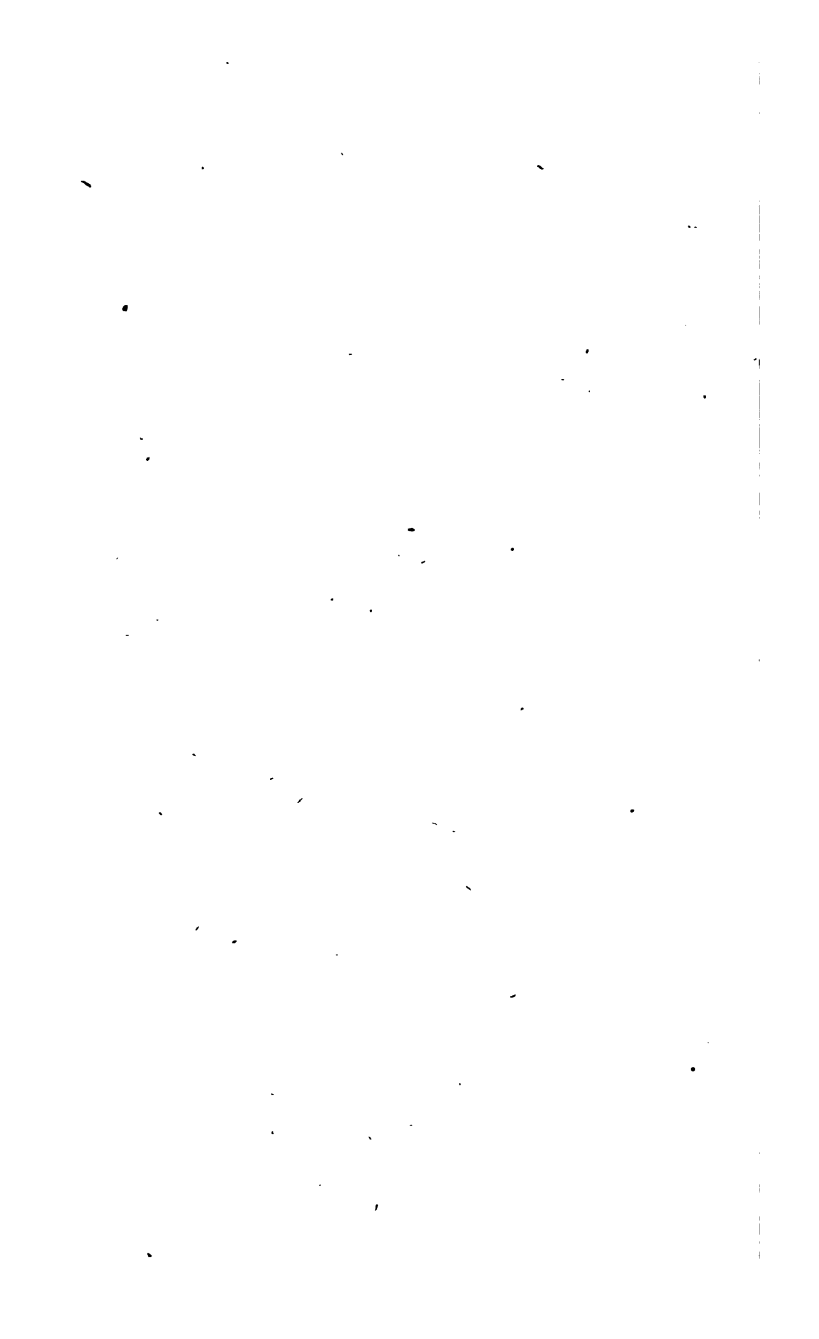
A P R A Y E R.

O MOST gracious God, who through the merits and mediation of thy blessed Son Jesus Christ, hast promised eternal life and happiness to those who, by a patient continuance in well-doing, seek for glory, honour, and immortality; give me, I most humbly beseech thee, a firm and lively faith in all thy promises; that, having the fullest assurance of those important truths which thou hast been pleased to reveal to us in the gospel, I may make it the principal concern of my life to obtain thy favour and protection. Grant, O Lord, that the path of duty, may to me be a path of pleasure; that I may love the things which thou commandest, and desire that which thou dost promise.

Let the hopes and expectations of that unspeakable happiness which thou hast prepared for us hereafter ; enable me to pass through this vale of tears, with cheerfulness, and a perfect resignation to thy will ; and to bear with patience whatever troubles thou, in thy great wisdom, mayest permit to visit me. Wean me, O Lord, from the vanities of this transitory world, and suffer me not to become weary of well-doing ; but so fix my thoughts and affections on things above, that, by the assistance of thy Holy Spirit, I may persevere in a course of piety and virtue, and finally, at the great day of retribution, may be among the number of those to whom it shall be said, “ Well done, thou good and faithful servant, enter thou into the joy of thy Lord.” Grant this, O merciful Father, through the merits, and for the sake of my blessed Redeemer, Jesus Christ. Amen.

 In this edition of **THE GREAT IMPORTANCE OF A RELIGIOUS LIFE**, the Editor has taken the liberty of making some few alterations: These are, principally, in the mode of expression, which the change of style that has taken place since the first publication of the work, appeared to have rendered necessary.

A
FEW CONCISE
OBSERVATIONS
ON
PRAYER;
THE IMPORTANCE OF THAT DUTY,
AND THE
BEST MEANS OF PERFORMING IT.
TO WHICH ARE ADDED, SOME
MORNING AND EVENING
PRAYERS.



A few Concise Observations, &c.

P RAYER is the noblest exercise of the soul; the nearest approach to Almighty God, and the highest enjoyment of him, of which we are capable in this life. It is a service which we owe him as our Creator and Preserver, and is not only highly reasonable in itself, but in many places of scripture is expressly enjoined by Christ and his apostles, as a necessary condition, and a sure means of having our wants supplied. Our Saviour (Matt. vii. 7.) makes our asking the only means of our receiving; "Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find." And St. James expressly saith, (James iv. 2.) "That we have not, because we ask not:" And St. Paul's precept is, (Phil.

iv. 6.) “That in every thing by prayer ‘and supplication, with thanksgiving, we ‘let our requests be made known unto ‘God.” Not that he wants to be informed what our necessities are, for he understands them much better than we ourselves; and, as our Saviour saith, (Matt. vi. 8.) “knoweth what things we have need ‘of before we ask Him.” But the design of making prayer a religious ordinance, and obliging christians to *ask* that they may *receive*, is to preserve upon their minds a constant sense of their dependance upon God, and an habitual reverence and obedience to him and his laws.

It has been observed, and with great truth, that by persevering in the sincere performance of this duty, we shall either be compelled to abandon a sinful course of life; or, a continuance in such a course of life, will compel us to abandon prayer—and hence the importance of the proper discharge of this great duty is obvious.

If then the performance of the duty of prayer be a matter of such importance, *the*

manner in which that duty can be most properly and acceptably preformed, must be an object worthy our most serious attention and inquiry.

There can, I conceive, be little doubt but that those prayers which are conceived in the mind, and afterwards delivered in such language as may be thought most proper, are preferable to set or pre-composed forms of prayer.

Among the many reasons which might be given for this preference, the following are, perhaps, the most obvious.

1st. There is great danger that the constant use of a set form of prayer, however good in itself, will in time degenerate into mere lip service; and though this consequence does not always follow, yet notwithstanding our best endeavours to the contrary, it is very apt to make our spirits cold and flat, formal and indifferent to our devotion—the frequent repetition of the same words in a great measure destroying that effect which at first, perhaps, they were well calculated to produce on our minds.

2d. The constant use of forms of prayer has a tendency to keep from us a knowledge of ourselves, or an intimate acquaintance with our own hearts. In the performance of this duty, it is evident that our thoughts and affections should regulate the choice of our words; but, on the contrary, a set form of words is made to direct the thoughts and affections.

3d. No set form of prayer can continue well adapted to the particular situation of any person; since the state of mind, if not the temporal affairs of almost every man is subject to frequent change: so much so, that the same form which might be very proper at one time to make known our situation and wants, or to return thanks for particular mercies received, would, at another period, be totally unsuitable.

But supposing it were always easy to meet with such prayers pre-composed, as would suit our particular situation; yet the ability to pray without such assistance would still surely be very desirable.

To those, then, who may wish to be able,

in words and expressions of their own, without the help of form, to offer up their petitions to Almighty God, and who are not furnished with better helps, the following observations may not be unacceptable.

In the first place it is necessary that we be well convinced in our own minds of the great importance and advantage of the gift of prayer, and that it is worthy our most serious endeavours to obtain ; and as we must be convinced of the excellent use of it where it is attained, so also we should believe, that where it is not, it may be attained, and that without any great difficulty. Many, no doubt, are discouraged from using their endeavours to attain it, by an opinion that such endeavours would prove ineffectual. To them it seems a thing so far above the reach of their ability, that to attempt it would be utterly useless. Such an opinion is of very bad consequence, as in other matters of religion, so more particularly in this, and should therefore be carefully guarded against ; for although it may be more difficult to some than to others, yet we have the best authority for believing it is impossible.

to none ; for our Saviour hath said, (Matt. vii. 8.) “ Every one that asketh, receiveth ; and he that seeketh, findeth ; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened.”

We should rightly understand and consider with whom we have to do in prayer, which will encourage us to come before God, though in the midst of many infirmities and imperfections. He is our kindest father, our most sincere friend, our greatest benefactor : He is acquainted with the weakness of our frame, and maketh allowance for all our infirmities : He is not extreme to mark what is amiss in manner or expression where the heart is sincere. The most worthy and rational idea we can entertain of God, in this respect, is by considering what would be the feelings and conduct of an affectionate parent towards his children, when they came to beg his forgiveness and assistance. If they came in the sincerity of their hearts, and presented their petitions in the best manner they were able, surely, by such a parent, those petitions would not be rejected on account of any imperfection, however great, in the manner of presenting them—

how much more then would our Heavenly Father compassionate our weakness?—He who is infinitely more kind and merciful than the most affectionate of fathers or mothers are or can be ; and when, added to this, we consider that we have an advocate, a zealous advocate, with the Father, Jesus Christ the Righteous, who is the great High Priest of our profession, and who will never desert the cause of those who seek him in sincerity and purity of heart, surely we shall see no cause for despair.

We should implore the assistance of God's Holy Spirit to enable us to offer up our petitions acceptably : Should beg of Him who is the Father of lights, and from whom cometh every good and perfect gift, to bestow this gift upon us. We read, (Luke xi. 1.) that one of the disciples came to Jesus Christ upon this errand, " Lord teach us to pray," and he had his request presently granted. We may plead the relation of a child from the scripture, (Gal. iv. 6.) " And because you are sons, God hath sent forth the spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying Abba Father : " And the promise also

from that scripture, (Zech. xii. 10.) “I
‘ will pour upon the house of David and the
‘ inhabitants of Jerufalem, the ſpirit of grace
‘ and of ſupplication.” Theſe paſſages, I
truſt, will be thought ſufficient to encour-
age our faith and hope in the divine aſſiſt-
ance.

Before we addreſs ourſelves to this duty,
were we to read a portion of the holy ſcrip-
ture it would be of great uſe, not only in
putting us in a proper frame of mind, but
alſo in furniſhing us both with matter and
words for prayer. David’s Pſalms and Paul’s
Epiſtles might be read with great advantage
on thoſe occaſions. The Holy Spirit hath
provided for us a treaſury or ſtore-houſe of
what is ſuitable for every occaſion; and when
both the words and the matter of our pray-
ers are drawn therefrom, and our own frame
of mind and affections are conformable
thereto, we have great reaſon to believe he
will lend a favorable ear to our petitions.
In many paſſages of the holy volumes he
hath himſelf put words into our mouths for
the purpoſe, as (Hof. xiv. 2.) “Take with
‘ you, words”—(Matt. vi. 9.) “After this

‘ manner therefore pray ye ;’ and in many other places.

There must be some acquaintance with our own hearts, with our spiritual condition, our wants and ways, or no good will be done in this matter. What is it that supplies the poor beggar at our doors with apt and pertinent expressions wherewith to move our compassion?—he needs not the help of friend or book on these occasions ; his very looks are an appeal to our humanity, and he is eloquent even in silence—it is a strong feeling of the pressure of *want*—a sense of need, hunger, thirst, cold and nakedness :—So, if we are deeply sensible of our sinful and helpless condition, and address ourselves to that God who is ever more ready to help us than we are to solicit his assistance, words will readily offer themselves in which to offer up our petitions ; for he understands the language even of sighs and tears which cannot be uttered, (Rom. viii. 26.)

It is expedient, in performing our stated devotions, to observe a method in the arrangement of the different parts of which

our prayers are composed : These parts are four in number, and the following appears to be the natural order in which they stand.

1st. *Adoration* ; which consists in addressing God with the highest admiration and reverence, and ascribing unto him that glory which is so justly his due, as the Creator and preserver of us, and of all mankind—of the world and of every thing in it : As the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whose death and resurrection we may be saved from the dreadful consequences of sin : As a Being whose wisdom and goodness are infinite, whose mercy is everlasting, and whose power has no limits. With the mention of these, or such other of the attributes of God as may make us most sensible of the goodness and power of the Divine Nature, and of our absolute dependance upon him, we should begin our petitions. This would be a means of raising our hearts into lively acts of worship and adoration ; it would impress upon our minds a holy awe of his greatness ; would humble us with a conviction of our own littleness, and

strengthen our faith and hope, by reminding us of his goodness and mercy.

2d. *Confession*. An humble confession of our sins should form a part of every prayer—original sin as the spring-head;—actual sin as the stream proceeding from it. In performing this part of our duty, and more particularly when in private, we should not be satisfied with a *general* acknowledgment of our wickedness, perverseness and depravity, but should descend to *particulars*, laying open our whole hearts before God, hiding nothing from his view, but disclosing to him our most secret vices and infirmities; aggravating our faults from the circumstances attending them, and condemning ourselves in his sight for their commission. As a standard whereby to judge our own conduct, it is necessary to acquaint ourselves with the divine law, the precepts and prohibitions of it, particularly with their extent and spiritual nature; and by taking these as a rule, and daily examining how far our thoughts, words and actions have been in conformity or opposition thereto, we can-

not fail in discovering the true state of our souls.

3d. *Petition.* It is proper to ask of God such good things as he hath promised and we have need of, both concerning this life and that which is to come—As to the latter, we should pray for mercy to pardon our sins already committed, and grace to strengthen us for the future—respecting the former, for those things which he, in his unerring wisdom, knows will be most profitable for us; and for a heart to be therewith contented.

We should also pray for the church of God, for christians of every denomination, and for the conversion of unbelievers: for the land of our nativity, magistrates, ministers, relations, friends, the whole race of mankind generally, and even for our enemies, *but more particularly for the afflicted and distressed.*

4th. *Thanksgiving.* This is a most pleasing part of our duty, and should occupy a considerable portion of our daily addresses to the Author of all good. To return thanks for mercies received, both public and per-

sonal, is enjoined us as a duty by the holy scriptures ; and our neglect in this particular, would be not only a breach of that duty, but the highest degree of ingratitude. When we consider that every thing we enjoy, even life itself, is the free gift of God ; that he not only supports us while in this world, but has suffered his beloved Son to become a sacrifice for our sins, that we may be happy to all eternity in the next : When we consider these things, and the thousand other motives of gratitude which they suggest, we shall never be at a loss for subjects of praise and thanksgiving to so great a Benefactor—so merciful a God !

Although the preceding method for the arrangement of the matter of our prayers be not so necessary as in no case to be departed from ; yet the general adoption of it would be very proper, and is particularly necessary for those who are not yet proficient in the performance of this duty.

Notwithstanding however what has been said in favor of pre-conceived prayer, yet it must by no means be inferred from

thence that it is wished all set forms should be thrown aside as useless : on the contrary it is believed that to some persons they may be highly useful, and to others absolutely necessary.

Various are the natural talents and capacities of men : Some there are who possess from nature, as it were, a fluency of speech and the agreeable talent of expressing their thoughts with ease ; while others (perhaps their superiors in capacity and understanding) give utterance to their feelings with considerable difficulty. In these cases, however, as in all others, the proportion of gifts received, is the measure of duty to be performed. To persons of the latter description, the adoption of some such plan as the following, is recommended.

Once a month I would draw up a new morning and evening prayer for my own or family use, according to the method already advised ; ^h always making it one of my pe-

(g) The reader may find the subject of prayer more largely treated on by Dr. Watts, in his " Guide to Prayer," from which several of the hints contained in these observations are taken.

titions, that God would assist me with his Holy Spirit, and bestow upon me the gift of prayer. These I would use constantly for the whole of that month, not confining myself, however, to the use of those very words, but giving myself liberty to put in or leave out, to enlarge or contract, according to the then state of my heart, and dictates of my feelings. - Thus, by degrees, I would write less and less, at last setting down little more than heads, or hints of thought or expression. By this means the difficulty of praying without the assistance of a set form of prayer would, by the blessing of God, in the course of time, be surmounted.

Although the use of pre-composed forms of prayer is not recommended to any but those who really stand in need of their assistance ; yet such is the infirmity of human nature in its present state, and so little are we capable of commanding, at all times, the use of our own faculties, that perhaps we should all do well in taking care to have these helps at hand. Indeed, were we to make a rule of laying before us at stated hours of devotion, a form of prayer of our

own composing, not for the purpose of general use, but to be used only on those unhappy occasions when we experience a heaviness of spirit—a coldness of heart, and distraction and imbecility of mind, I should see no impropriety in the practice.

Though the confining ourselves to the constant use of any set form of words be by no means expedient, yet the attentive study of pious and well composed prayers, would be of great use in forming our expression, and instructing us in the language proper for prayer. With that view, the careful perusal of the holy scriptures, particularly Paul's Epistles and David's Psalms, have already been recommended, and to these might be added the book of Job.

From what has been said, it is hoped that some may be induced to apply themselves seriously to the performance of this truly important duty; and such, through the aid of divine Grace, will, no doubt, in a short time find *that* to become easy and delightful, which at first, perhaps, appeared difficult and irksome.

The promise is to him that hath, (that is, who hath, and useth what he hath) more shall be given. Although we cannot do what we would, yet let us fail not to do what we can, wherein the Father of Mercies will accept us, according to his everlasting covenant in Christ Jesus—"For he knoweth
' whereof we are made, and remembereth
' that we are but dust."

P R A Y E R S.

A Morning Prayer for a Family.ⁱ

ALMIGHTY God! Father of all mercies, we thine unworthy servants present ourselves with all humility before thy divine majesty, to offer to thee this our morning sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving, for all thy goodness and loving kindness vouchsafed to us thy sinful creatures. We bless thee for creating us capable of loving and enjoying thee eternally : for preserving us from innumerable accidents and dangers through the whole course of our lives until this time ; for refreshing us the night past with com-

(i) The Editor has taken the liberty of substituting the following Prayers for those referred to in Mr. Mejmoth's preface.

fortable sleep ; and for bringing us safe to the light of this day. We bless thee for our food and raiment, for our health and friends, and for all the comforts and accommodations of this life. But above all, we praise and magnify thy holy name, for thine inestimable love in the redemption of the world by our Lord Jesus Christ, for the means of grace, and for the hope of glory : And we beseech thee give us such a sense of these and all thy mercies, that our thankfulness may display itself in a devotion to thy service, and by our walking before thee in the paths of holiness and righteousness, during the remainder of our lives.

We acknowledge, O Lord ! that we have rendered ourselves unworthy of thy favours by our frequent breaches of thy holy laws, in thought, word, and deed : we have left undone the things thou hast commanded, and have done those things thou hast forbidden, and it is of thy mercy alone that we are not consumed. But O most mighty and merciful God, who wouldest not the death of a sinner, but rather that he should turn from his wickedness and be saved ; mer-

cifully forgive us our trespasses, and receive and comfort us, who are wearied with the burden of our sins ; that by thy pardon and peace, we may be cleansed from all our iniquities, and may serve thee with a quiet mind to the end of our days,

And thou, O God ! who art the protector of all who put their trust in thee, without whom nothing is strong, nothing is holy, increase and multiply upon us thy mercy ; be thou our ruler and guide, and so teach us to number our days that we may apply our hearts unto heavenly wisdom. Wean us, O Lord, from the vanities and pleasures of the world, and give us a full conviction of their emptiness and insufficiency, and grant that we may so pass through things temporal, that we finally lose not the things eternal.

Give unto us, O Lord ! the increase of faith, hope, and charity ; and that we may obtain that which thou dost promise, make us to love that which thou dost command. Thou hast taught us, that all our doings without charity are nothing worth ; send, therefore thy Holy Spirit, and pour into our

hearts that most excellent gift, the very bond of peace and of all virtues, without which whoever liveth is counted dead before thee. And since thou hast permitted thy only Son to become both a sacrifice for sin, and an example of a godly life, give us grace most thankfully to receive that his inestimable benefit, and to follow his blessed steps until time with us shall be no more.

Preserve, O Lord ! in our minds such a lively sense of thy presence ; of thy constant privacy to our most secret thoughts, as may influence every action of our lives ; but more particularly we beseech thee to direct and sanctify every part of our conduct this day : Keep us chaste in all our thoughts, temperate in all our enjoyments, humble in all opinions of ourselves, and charitable in our opinions of others : make us meek and peaceable under every provocation, sincere and faithful in our professions, and so strictly just and upright in all our dealings, that no necessity may force, nor prospect of gain allure us to take advantage of, or defraud our neighbour in any respect ; but

grant, O Lord ! that in our intercourse with mankind, the invariable rule of our lives may be, to do unto others as we would they should do unto us.

We make our humble supplications unto thee, O Lord ! for the prosperity of these United States, for all our benefactors, friends and relations, for our enemies, and for all estates and conditions of men : Give thy Son the heathen for his inheritance, and the utmost parts of the world for his possession ; grant success to the endeavours of those who are engaged in the propagation of christian knowledge throughout the world, that thy way may be known upon earth, and thy saving health among all nations. May it please thee, O Lord ! to purify and defend thy church ; to bless all who are in authority, either as ministers of thy gospel or as officers of the government under which we live, that in their several stations they may be instrumental to thy glory and the public good ; to comfort the distressed of every description, to shorten their sufferings, and to give them a happy deliverance out of all their af-

fiction. Accept, O merciful Father ! of these our humble praises and supplications, in the name, and for the sake, of our blessed Redeemer Jesus Christ, who hath taught us thus to pray :

Our Father, &c.

An Evening Prayer for a Family.

ALMIGHTY God, who dwellest in that light which no mortal eye can approach, yet condescendest to regard the children of men, we thy sinful creatures present ourselves before thee in an humble sense of our own unworthiness. We acknowledge, O Lord ! our manifold transgressions of thy righteous laws in thought, word, and deed ; we have followed the devices of our own corrupt hearts, we have done the things which thou hast forbidden, and have left undone the things which thou

haſt commanded, and are altogether unworthy of thy countenance and protection. But O Gracious Father ! who deſireſt not the death of a ſinner, for the merits of thy dear Son, Jeſus Chriſt, be thou merciful unto us : Pardon, we beſeech thee, our paſt offences ; create in us new and contrite hearts, and ſo ſtrengthen us by thy Holy Spirit, that we, who cannot do any thing that is good of ourſelves, may, for the time to come, by thee be enabled to live according to thy will. And thou, O God ! whoſe providence ſuperintendeſt the affairs of mankind, remove from us we beſeech thee every thing which may be injurious, and beſtow upon us ſuch things as thou ſeeſt will be profitable ; and ſince it is thou alone canſt regulate the affections of our corrupt nature, grant that we may love the things which thou commandeſt, and deſire that which thou doſt promiſe ; that ſo among the ever-changing ſcenes of this tranſitory world, our hearts may ſurely there be fixed where true joys are to be found.

Suffer us not, we beſeech thee, to loſe ſight of our latter end ; of that awful period

to which every moment brings us one step nearer, when we must resign up our souls into the hands of thee, O Father ! their maker and preserver ; but so guide us by thy Holy Spirit through this vale of tears, that at the general resurrection in the last day, we may be found acceptable in thy sight, and receive that blessing which thy beloved Son shall then confer upon all those who have truly loved and served thee.

May thy watchful Providence, O Lord ! take us this night under its protection : Suffer not any evil to approach either our souls or bodies, but grant that in the morning we may arise refreshed, and rejoice to perform the duties of the several stations in which thou hast been pleased to place us.

Extend thy goodness, O Lord ! to the whole race of mankind : Have mercy upon the heathen world, and upon unbelievers of every description ; Let those who walk in darkness see light, make thyself known unto their hearts, and cause the sun of thy righteousness to shine upon all nations. May it please thee to purify and defend thy

church, and to bestow thy blessing upon all those who are in authority, either as ministers of thy gospel, or as officers of the government under which we live; that in their several stations they may be instrumental to thy glory and the public good. We make our humble supplications unto thee, O Lord! for all our benefactors, friends and relations, and also for our very enemies; let thy fatherly hand be ever over them, let thy Holy Spirit be ever with them, and so lead them in the knowledge of thee, that in the end they may obtain everlasting life. Look with an eye of compassion upon all those who are afflicted or distressed in mind, body, or estate; give them patience under their sufferings, and a happy issue out of all their afflictions.

And now, O God! accept, we beseech thee, our most grateful thanks for thy preservation of us hitherto; for the comforts and conveniencies, as well as the necessities of life, and in particular for the many unmerited blessings which we have enjoyed during the past day; but above all we adore thy goodness in that thou hast been pleased to accept the sacrifice of our dear Redeemer,

Jesus Christ, as an atonement for the sins of mankind: For our sakes he condescended to take our nature upon him, to be despised and rejected of men; he humbled himself even to death upon the cross, that he might make us the children of God, and exalt us to everlasting life. Teach us, O Lord! to express our thankfulness by obeying his precepts, and studying to serve thee in holiness and righteousness to the end of our lives. Accept, O merciful Father, of these our prayers and praises, in and through the mediation of thy blessed Son, our Saviour Jesus Christ, who hath taught us thus to address thee:

Our Father, &c.

A Morning Prayer for a Person in private.

ALMIGHTY God, who hast measured the waters in the hollow of thine hand and meted out the heavens with a span, yet condescendest to regard the children of men! in an humble confidence of thy goodness I

presume to offer to thee, O Father of Mercies ! this the morning sacrifice of my praise and thanksgiving.

I most gratefully thank thee, O Lord ! for my creation, for thy preservation of me during the past night, and for the innumerable blessings I have hitherto enjoyed ; but above all for thine inestimable love in the redemption of mankind from the dreadful consequences of sin ; of the least of which benefits I, thine unworthy servant, am wholly undeserving ; But O Merciful Father ! who desirest not the death of a sinner, for the sake of thy dear Son, pardon, I beseech thee, my manifold transgressions.

And thou, O God ! who knowest the weakness and depravity of my nature, and the temptations with which I am surrounded, compassionate, I beseech thee, my infirmities, and replenish me with thy grace : Be with me, O Lord ! this day and to the close of my life : Preserve me in faith, hope, and charity ; in humility, temperance, and chastity ; and so guide me by thy Holy Spirit, that in all my thoughts, words, and actions, I may glorify thy holy name, and finally through thy mercy, obtain everlasting life

My temporal concerns I also beg to resign into thy hands : May it please thee, O Lord ! to direct me in all my affairs, to bestow upon me such things as thou seekest will be profitable, and to give me an heart to be therewith content. In my intercourse with mankind, enable me, I beseech thee, to conduct myself with the strictest regard to integrity ; and suffer me not to lose sight of that awful day, when I must render an account of all my actions to thee, who art of purer eyes than to behold iniquity.

Extend, O God ! thy fatherly protection to all my benefactors, friends, and relations, to mine enemies, and to the whole human race : Illuminate them with thy gospel, guide them in the paths of thy righteousness, and finally conduct them to those heavenly regions where is fulness of joy for evermore.

Accept, O Lord ! I beseech thee, of these mine humble praises and supplications, in the name, and through the mediation of my blessed Redeemer, Jesus Christ, in whose comprehensive words I sum up all my wants :

Our Father, &c.

An Evening Prayer for a Person in private.

ALMIGHTY God, who hast called the universe into existence, and didst breathe thro' all nature the breath of life! deeply impressed with a sense of my own unworthiness, yet encouraged by thy goodness, I present myself before thee, my Creator, my Preserver, and my Hope!

Lord! I confess myself a miserable sinner; my heart is the seat of depravity; I am continually transgressing thy holy laws, and it is of thy mercy alone that I am not consumed: But thou art a Being infinite in goodness as in power; Thou knowest whereof I am made, and rememberest that I am but dust: Pardon, then, I most humbly beseech thee, my manifold transgressions; for the sake of thy dear Son, Jesus Christ, be thou merciful unto me, who am altogether unworthy of thy forgiveness. And thou, O God! who art acquainted with all my wants, and perceivest the dangers and temptations with which I am encompassed, assist me, I beseech thee,

with thy Holy Spirit ; that I, who of myself cannot do any thing that is good, may, through thy grace, be enabled to live according to thy will. Enable me, O Lord ! to reform whatever thou see'st amiss in my conduct ; root out of my heart every vicious propensity, and wean me from the vanities of this transitory world : Suffer me not to forget that the present life is but a state of probation ; the path only which leads to an eternity of happiness or misery ; and so conduct me through this vale of tears, that finally I may be received into those heavenly mansions, where is fulness of joy for evermore.

May thy watchful Providence, O Lord ! take me this night under its protection, and suffer not any evil to approach either my soul or body ; but grant that in the morning I may arise refreshed, and cheerfully perform the duties of the station in which thou hast been pleased to place me.

Unto thee, O Lord ! I would present my petitions for all my benefactors, friends and relations, and even for my very enemies ; Let thy paternal hand be ever over them,

let thy Holy Spirit be ever with them, and so guide them in the paths of truth and righteousness, that in the end they may obtain everlasting life. May it please thee to purify and defend thy church, to bestow thy blessing upon all who are in authority either as ministers of thy gospel or as officers of the government of these States, that in their several stations they may be instrumental to thy glory and the public good. Look with an eye of compassion upon the afflicted and distressed of every description ; and may it please thee to support them under their troubles, to shorten their duration, and to give them a happy issue out of all their afflictions. Extend thy goodness, O Lord ! to the whole race of mankind : Have mercy upon the heathen world, and upon unbelievers of every denomination ; make thyself known unto their hearts, bring them acquainted with the gospel of peace, and so gather them into thy flock, that there may be but one fold under one shepherd.

And now, O Lord ! accept I beseech thee my most grateful thanks for the innumerable

blessings I have hitherto enjoyed ; for my creation and preservation, for the comforts and conveniences as well as the necessities of life ; but above all I adore thy goodness in accepting, as an atonement for the sins of mankind, the sacrifice of thy beloved Son Jesus Christ : For our salvation he condescended to be made man, and to suffer a cruel and ignominious death upon the cross—he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities, and with his stripes we are healed ! For which inestimable love teach me O Lord ! to express my thankfulness by obeying his precepts, and studying to serve thee in holiness and righteousness to the end of my days. Grant these my humble petitions, O Merciful Father ! for the sake of thy beloved Son, Jesus Christ, who hath taught me thus to pray :

Our Father, &c.

T H E E N D.

ERRATA.



Page. Line.

54	22	for that state	read this state
67	9	— most opposite	<i>more opposite.</i>
69	20	— the acquisition	their acquisition.
81	1	— have not heard	had not heard.
141	8	— they intended	they were intended.
234	7 9, & 12,	hath	hast.
235	25	— ditto	ditto.
246	1	— ditto	ditto.
	2	— doth	doft.
300	22	— that which	what





